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DORRIEN OF CRANSTON.

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DORRIEN OF CRANSTON.

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BY

BERTRAM MITFORD

AUTHOR OF

"FORDHAM'S FEUD," "A VELDT OFFICIAL," "THE WORD OF THE SORCERESS,"
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DORRIEN OF CRANSTON.

CHAPTER I.

CONCERNING CERTAIN DORRIENS.

GENERAL DORRIEN sits at the breakfast table in the cheerful dining-room at Cranston Hall, with a frown upon his face and an open letter in his hand.

He is a handsome man, with severe, regular features; a man of whom his dependents would certainly stand in awe, and his family would fear more than love. There is sternness in the glance of his keen eyes, in the cut of the closely-trimmed grey moustache and whisker, and in every movement of the erect military figure. A man of iron will, not to be turned aside from his own hard and fast rule of right and wrong by any consideration—what chance had the foibles and follies of youth with one of this mould? And there he sits, motionless, gazing upon the open letter, the frown deepening upon his brow.

The letter bears an American postmark and is from his eldest son, whom he has not seen for eight years. It is business-like in the terse brevity of its wording, for it merely, and as a matter of duty, announces the writer's intended return to England, tidings one would think that should gladden a father's heart.

But in this case not so. Roland Dorrien and his father had parted in bitter anger. Faults on both sides, of course. The former wild, reckless and imprudent, as youth too strictly and needlessly restrained is almost sure to prove; the latter merciless and unbending. Resentful feelings and hot, hasty temper, met by additional severity and cold scorn—thus they had parted, and save two or three curt communications on money matters had held no intercourse

since. And the son, sharing largely in the paternal force of will, has made no attempt at apology or conciliation during his exile; and now he is coming home.

So the General's reflections are not of a comforting nature. He has not softened during these years. Never was he known to give way; all must yield to him. The exile has not done this; therefore Time, rather than heal the paternal anger, has only consolidated it.

Roland is not his first-born. There was another, a fine cavalry soldier, who had already begun to distinguish himself in his father's profession, and him the General had loved as the apple of his eye. But one day news of a terrible Alpine fatality arrived at Cranston Hall. An Englishman and his two guides—both incompetent—had been lost on the Lauteraar glacier. They were seen by another party not very far behind them on that dangerous pass suddenly to disappear—and upon these arriving at the spot, a fresh rift in the brink of a black, bottomless crevasse showed that the edge had given way beneath the doomed trio who had approached it regardless of proper precaution. There yawned the horrible fissure, its glassy blue sides falling perpendicular into unknown depths, and revealing the barest possible traces of the catastrophe to the horror-stricken witnesses. The Englishman who had thus found a nameless grave in the most stupendous of Nature's vaults was Vernon Dorrien, the General's eldest son, and the light of the old soldier's life seemed thenceforth to be buried there also.

Roland was now the heir and would reign in his dead brother's place. Not of legal right though, for the entail ended with the present Squire, who had it in his power to will Cranston as he chose. But the General had his own stern ideas of right. The Dorriens had always held Cranston from father to son, or, failing male issue, from brother to brother, and in spite of his aversion to his eldest surviving son the latter would succeed him in the ancestral domain. Right and justice would not allow Roland to be disinherited, but that he should fill his dead brother's place was very unpalatable to General Dorrien.

And now he sits with the letter in his hand gazing meditatively out upon the sunlit lawn and the noble elms

in the park, and on the wooded hollows beneath the brown heather-clad uplands; and his soul is filled with bitterness as he thinks of the man who was to have owned all this fair domain now lying cold and stiff in his vast and icy tomb. The cawing of rooks floats in through the half-open window, and the flower-beds are stirred by a cool, soft breath from yon patch of amethyst sea just glimpsed through a dip in the downs away there to the right.

The window shuts with an angry slam, the result of the sudden opening of a door. He looks up quickly as a lady enters—an elderly lady with a strong-minded face. She must have been very handsome in her youth—she is handsome yet, though her dark hair is only just beginning to turn grey, and her large eyes are clear and lustrous still; but the firm moulding of mouth and chin seems to show that her will is nearly, if not quite, as determined as that of her husband. She takes her place opposite to him at the table.

"I have a letter here"—he begins—"from Roland."

"Yes? And what does he say?" Her tone betrays scant interest in the subject, and she busies herself with the urn.

"Very little that he ought to say—very little indeed. Why, madam, you have taught your children the Fifth Commandment to small purpose." And he hands her the letter with a bitter smile.

She takes it frowning, but without a word, for she has long learnt the futility of trying to stem his taunts or his anger. Her domineering spirit would long since have reduced most men to submission, but in her husband she had found her master; and thus for many a year a cold-hearted peace has reigned between them, but their characters are too much alike ever to harmonise, and they know it.

"He does not say he is coming home," she remarks, handing back the letter—"only to England."

"And he does not express a shadow of regret for his shameful behaviour before he went away, or for his treatment of me. And yet he talks about 'his duty to inform me of his return.' His duty!" repeats the General with bitter sarcasm.

"You know I told you, at the time, you were too hard on him. Things might have been worse."

"Too hard on him! Might have been worse! Eleanor, are you mad? A son of mine to be threatened with a common breach of promise action by common low people. I don't see what could be worse."

"Well, it was only a threat. The boy was imprudent, of course; but then, he was very young."

"But old in vice, no doubt. But it was not so much the disgraceful affair itself that I felt, as that a son of mine should be mixed up with low, vulgar people."

"They were not so very low. The father was a professional man—a surgeon in good practice, and——"

"And would assess his daughter's affections at £4,000, and would exhibit the young *lady* in open court as a butt for the ribald wit of a filthy mob, and for the questioning and brow-beating and broad jeers of a set of profligate barristers. Really, Eleanor, I am at a loss to see how lowness and vulgarity could descend much further."

To this conclusive retort she makes no reply. Then tentatively—

"But don't you think, Reginald, that he ought to come here now? He ought to be known in the county, if—if——"

"If he is one day to take his place here—is not that what you wanted to say? Well, whether he does so or not depends upon himself. I may bequeath Cranston as I choose. Most men would cast off a son for a tenth of the undutiful conduct Roland has shown towards me; but I waive that. I only desire to be just. Roland will take his place here just as if he were the inheritor at law. But if ever he disgraces himself again, not one shilling will he get from me, and Cranston will go to his brother. So you had better find an early opportunity of warning him."

It is lamentable to have to record the fact, but her husband's resentment against his son was not so displeasing to Mrs. Dorrien as her conscience told her should have been the case. For even as all his affection is buried in the grave of his first-born, so does she dote upon her youngest. For the exiled Roland she has little love. He is too strong of will for her; and no more than over his

father has she ever been able to exercise over him that power she delights in. But to see her idolised Hubert installed at Cranston as its heir—even though in his brother's place—is a tempting picture to the eyes of this woman, whose one weakness is love of her idol. To do her justice, conscience prevails, and she is about to urge even more in defence of the absent one, when a step is heard on the stairs, and the General exclaims:

"Hush. No more now. I hear Nellie coming down. Oblige me by not mentioning this"—tapping the letter—"to her, or to anyone, at present."

"Good morning, papa," cries a fresh, cheerful voice, and the old man's face softens perceptibly beneath his daughter's kiss. She is a tall, largely-made girl, but not in the least gawky or ungraceful; and although her features are too irregular for conventional beauty, yet a profusion of soft brown hair, blue eyes and the warm flush tingeing a clear skin, together with a bright, taking expression when she smiles, combine to render Nellie Dorrien a pretty girl—some think, a very pretty girl.

"You're late, child," says the General, not unkindly. "Better sit down and get your breakfast. I must go and attend to my correspondence"—and gathering up his letters he goes out.

"I do think, Nellie," began her mother, as soon as they were left alone, "I do think you might take the trouble to be down a little sooner. Your papa is so vexed when everybody is late, and now you are both late, and he'll be doubly so."

"But he was not a bit cross, mamma, at least not with me."

"Not with you! No, perhaps not. But Hubert isn't down yet, and it'll all fall upon him. However, as you are safe, it doesn't matter about poor Hubert," added Mrs. Dorrien acidly.

"Really, mamma, I don't think it's quite fair to saddle me with Hubert's derelictions. Surely he is old enough to take care of himself," gently objected the girl.

"Of course. Selfishness is the order of the day in this house, I ought to have remembered that."

Nellie gave a little shrug of her shoulders, but made no

reply. She was far from being a selfish girl, but she could not see why everything and everybody should be made to give way to Hubert and his convenience, as it had to do wherever her mother's authority or influence reached. For Mrs. Dorrien chose to fancy her youngest son an invalid, on the strength of which that interesting youth at the age of twenty-two would have taken first prize at an unlicked cub show—supposing such an institution to exist. Nellie herself knew this reputed debility to be sheer fudge—which knowledge she unconsciously shared with certain convivial and raffish spirits who were wont to meet more nights a week than was good for them at the "Cock and Bull and Twisted Cable" in Wandsborough, and these latter could have accounted for the poor boy's chronic seediness more to his mother's enlightenment than satisfaction.

"Hallo, mother. Morning, Nell!" cried the object under discussion, entering the breakfast-room and sliding languidly into his place. A sallow, loosely-built, light-haired youth, somewhat deficient in chin, and with an irritating drawl.

"At last, Hubert dear. I began to think you must have had a bad night, and was getting anxious!" said his mother fondly. "How are you this morning, my boy? You don't look at all well."

She was right—in one sense. He had had a bad night, the above-mentioned sporting hostelry containing proportionately less whisky and soda, not to mention other varieties of tipple more or less deleterious. The General's hair would have stood straight on end had he known when and how his youngest born had arrived home.

"Oh, I'm all right, mother," growled that guileless youth, "except that I've got a deuce of a head on. But I say, what was the veteran looking so mortally black about just now? I met him on the stairs, or rather I saw him—he didn't see me, thank Heaven—and he was scowling like an assassin. He had a lot of letters in his fist. By the way"—breaking off with a start of alarm—"no one has been dunning him about—about me, don't you know. Eh?"

"No, no dear," quickly answered his mother. "It was

not about you. Your father is put out over his correspondence, but it is not about you. That I may say."

"That's lucky," said Hubert, greatly relieved. "I didn't know who might have been at him. But, mother, what was it about?" he persisted, his curiosity awakened in proportion as his fears were lulled.

"Nothing that you need mind," returned Mrs. Dorrien, rising and taking refuge from further questioning in flight.

"Nellie," began the young man, as soon as his mother had left the room, "I wish you knew the Rectory people."

"So do I. I just met the girls once at the Nevilles' garden party, and rather liked them. But mamma would sooner cut off her head than have anything to say to them. But why do you wish it?"

"Oh, I don't know. The eldest isn't up to much—too cold and stuck up. As for the young one—Sophie—she's a detestable brat. Tries to snub a fellow, don't you know. Thinks herself no end clever. But the middle one—Olive—fact is, she's a monstrously pretty girl."

"Ahem! And when did you make that discovery?"

"Why I saw her at the station the other day—and rather took stock of her; and I tell you, a fellow might make something of her."

"Or the other way about—she might make something of a fellow," returned his sister, with a slight curl of the lip.

"Go it!" exploded the other wrathfully. "Of course it's very funny and all that. I see what you mean, and the joke's a poor one. I thought you might be of some use to a fellow; but if you want to play the fool instead, why there's an end of it."

"My dear boy, I can't help you in the very least. You know mamma hates the sight of them, and as for papa he declares that if he had his will he would try poor Dr. Ingelow by drumhead court martial and have him shot. It's hard lines that we are to be at daggers drawn with people whom everybody says are awfully nice, just because their opinions are not ours, I must say."

"Well, I rather agree with the veteran. All that papistical stuff is awful bosh, and a parson who goes in for it is no better than a wolf in sheep's clothing—as old

mother Frewen always says. But all the same that's no reason why we shouldn't know the girls."

"Why didn't you make acquaintance with the brother at Oxford?" asked Nellie.

"Oh, I don't know. Didn't think it worth while then. These freshmen are generally a bore."

"Freshmen! Why this is his fourth term."

"Is it? I didn't know. Hallo—I say—there's the veteran calling you, outside. Better look sharp, the old man's face is getting apoplectic," he added teasingly, discerning that the French window was jammed and wouldn't open, and that the frown was deepening on their father's face where he stood at the other side of the gravel walk.

General Dorrien had been comfortably off before he succeeded his elder brother, with whom he had been on bad terms, and whose death, some five years previous to the opening of this narrative, took place on the high seas during the voyage home from South America—a voyage undertaken by medical advice. The General accepted his new position and its responsibilities perfectly naturally and easily, and at once set to work vigorously and with military precision to rectify the numerous derelictions which had prevailed and thriven under the sway of his easy-going predecessor. It stood to reason that many suffered by the change. Consequently the new Squire was not beloved. But if unpopular with his dependents, by his equals he was received with open arms. He had been a brilliant soldier in his time, and had served with distinction in more than one of our wars in the East; the county therefore felt proud of his fame, being, in fact, not wholly free from some idea of having itself contributed thereto. Then the late Squire had been a bachelor, but here was a family who would keep up Cranston as it should be kept up. There ought to be a law against old bachelors occupying such a place as Cranston, said the county, in its joy at seeing a family once more in possession at the Hall, and a family comprising two eligible sons—one of them a right royal "catch"—and a daughter who would certainly not be dowerless. So although on further acquaintance the General was feared rather than liked, yet

the county was very well satisfied. But its feminine side longed for the return of the eldest son to his ancestral home, with a solicitude that should have been insidiously flattering to the unconscious wanderer had he been aware of its existence.

CHAPTER II.

CONCERNING A MAN AND A DOG.

BEFORE a house in Cambridge Terrace a hansom draws up with that series of jerks peculiar to its kind, and discharges its freight—a man, a dog and a portmanteau, and while the first is making enquiries as to the occupant being within, the second is scampering up and down the footway as hard as he can pelt, for he has been pent up on shipboard and in trains for many a weary day, and now such an opportunity of stretching his legs is in no wise to be neglected.

"Not in?" the traveller is saying in reply to the servant who opens the door. "But he isn't out of town?"

"Oh no, sir. Mr. Venn's generally home before this. He may be in any minute now."

"All right. I'll wait for him. Here, cabman, lay hold of the other end," and between them they deposit the portmanteau, a battered and weatherworn campaigner, safe inside the hall door, and cabby, having received more than double his fare, retires well satisfied and mumbling gleefully, "Military gent 'ome from Hingia. 'Two bob and a 'arf crown from Euston. Yee-epp!"

"Just my luck," muses the traveller with vexation in his face, as he gazes round upon his friend's sitting-room, a typical bachelor den in all its pipe-and-book-and-stick-bestrewn untidiness. "Just my luck to come back to this cursed town to find the only man I know and could reckon on not at home—possibly out for the evening, and not a soul to speak to in the meanwhile."

Here a scuffle and a vigorous whine outside the front door cuts short his ruminations. Quickly he opens it.

"Roy, you rascal, come in, sir. Humbugging after cats as usual?" This address, though irate in wording, is affectionate in tone, as the beautiful animal bounds past the instant the door is open, and draws up in the absent

Venn's room, wagging his bushy tail and looking perfectly satisfied with himself. His glossy red-brown coat breaks off at the neck in a white curling ruff which continues down his broad chest, whose normal snowiness is now grimy with railway travel. The soft brown eyes, set in dark circles, and the smooth velvety ears, betray his collie origin, ennobled and broadened as this is by the sturdier proportions engrafted upon it by the admixture of a larger and sterner race—peradventure of the real Newfoundland or St. Bernard blood. After a few preliminary sniffs round the room the animal settles himself cosily on the rug, his soft, upturned eyes fixed affectionately upon his master. So much for the dog, and what of the man?

A tall and well-proportioned frame, which shows to advantage in its travel-worn suit of light tweed. A finely shaped head, carried high and erect and covered with dark clustering hair. A well-cut profile and regular features in which is an expression of quick readiness, render the face a striking and remarkable one, tanned as it is too by exposure to sun and weather. The eyes are very uncommon, and not at all in keeping with the dark complexion, being in fact violet blue; and there is that in their expression which, together with certain lines on the forehead, would to a physiognomist betray a stormy and unsettled spirit.

There is impatience in the gesture as he stands stroking his drooping moustache while gazing out into the rapidly darkening street. Suddenly Roy, raising his head, emits a threatening growl as a latch-key is turned in the front door. Then in a couple of strides a broad-shouldered, cheery looking fellow bursts into the room——

"Hallo!" is the startled greeting of the new-comer, pulling up short and wondering who the deuce was the intruder whose dog lay growling at him in right threatening fashion from his own hearth.

"All right, Venn. He won't eat you," is the stranger's reply. "But don't you know me?"

"Hanged if I do! No—yes—I do though. Why, Roland Dorrien, where on earth have you dropped from now?"

"'The clouds' you were going to say. No. The

Rockies—same thing. Plenty of cloud, literal and metaphorical, besets the way of those whose lives are cast yonder."

"By Jingo!" cried the other, passing his hand over his fair, closely cropped beard. "Why didn't you say you were coming back? And did you get this splendid chap out West?"

For Roy, having sniffed the new-comer and pronounced him satisfactory, was now looking up gravely into that worthy's face and wagging his brush as if desirous of an introduction.

"Yes. Traded him from an Indian who was battering him up a good bit with a rail because he didn't take kindly to dragging a sledge. And ever since he has stuck to me very much closer than a brother. But then, you see he's only a dog, not a human, which explains it.

"Well, you'd better shake down here," said Venn. "That is, if Mrs. Symes has a room. I'll ring and ask."

Mrs. Symes had a room, and the traveller shook down accordingly.

"I suppose you've been having a rare good time of it out West," began Venn as later in the evening they sat over their cigars. "Shooting grizzlies and Indians, and chevying buffaloes, while a poor stockbroking devil like myself has been tied by the leg to this well-worn spot. Why it doesn't seem eight years since I saw you off that jolly fine morning in search of fortune. And you're twice the man you were then. No wonder I didn't know you at first."

"It is eight years though, rather over than under. As for having a good time of it, 'Least said, &c.' That is until the good old Squire's bequest took effect, and then things weren't so bad, because, you see, I could do what I liked, and I did. I forgot—you haven't heard—how should you have?" seeing the other look slightly mystified. "Well then, the old Squire—my father's brother, you know—and I used to be very thick, which was good and sufficient reason for my not being allowed to go near him. He died five years ago, as you may or may not know, and I own to feeling a trifle sold at being as I thought cut off with a shilling. Well, a year back, I heard that the good old chap had left me all his personal property to the figure

of seven or eight hundred a year. His will stipulated that I was to be kept in the dark about it until my thirtieth birthday—a proviso for which I suppose I ought to feel devoutly grateful, for I was a consummate young ass in those days I'm afraid. Cranston, of course, was entailed, so he could do nothing with that. But he did the best he could for me."

"Lucky dog," said Venn. "And now you'll get Cranston into the bargain."

"Oh, hold hard, there. My chances of that are about equal to yours. Cranston *was* entailed—now it isn't; my affectionate parent was the last man of that ilk. He can will it as he likes now or make a fresh entail, and I'm afraid that won't be in my direction."

"But you and he are surely not at cuts after all these years," said Venn. "He'll be glad enough to see you again now."

"He isn't that sort. He's never got over that idiotic affair, or pretends he hasn't. You know what I mean"—as Venn again looked inquiringly. "You don't? Well, I don't see why I shouldn't tell you. There was a girl I used to be very thick with when I was up here before—didn't mean anything by it of course. I was a thoughtless young fool, you know, and all that sort of thing. She was pretty and taking, and I used to see a good deal of her and take her about a good bit. Not to put too fine a point upon it, we carried on considerably. I always was inclined to be an ass in that line."

"Quite so, old chap," laughed Venn, as the other paused in his narrative and stared dreamily in front of him. "So you were—and so you will be again. Drive on."

"Well things went smoothly enough for a while, and at last it struck me I was going a little too far, and so I began to haul off—found an excuse for leaving Town and so on. The admission sounds hang-dog I grant, but then, only remember my means and prospects—the first *nil*—ditto the second. To cut the matter short, one day—I was at home at the time—the General sent for me to his sanctum. Without a word he handed me a letter to read. It was from a lawyer, acting for the girl's father, and threatening to sue me for £4,000 damages for breach of promise.

They thought I wasn't worth anything—then at any rate—and so they'd try it on with my father. By the Lord, Venn old man, I spent a lively half-hour. How he did let drive. I had disgraced him—disgraced the family—disgraced everybody—wasn't fit to look a dog in the face or to be in the same backyard with a self-respecting cat, and so on. Well now, if he had behaved with ordinary judgment, I was quite ready to admit having made an ass of myself—an infernal ass if he liked—for I was disgusted at the preposterous threat and the extortionateness of the demand. It seemed to ruffle my callow sensibilities, don't you see. But when he simply volleyed abuse at me and wouldn't listen to a word I had to say, by Jove! my back got up too and there was a most awful row. He would disown me on the spot—cut me off with a shilling—unless I left England and stayed out of it till he gave me permission to return. I might go where I liked, but I must clear out of the country. Well, I elected to go out West—and went. You know the rest."

"Then that's how it was you went out there?" said Venn. "I always suspected there had been something under it deeper than you let out. And has he said you might return?"

"Not he. I didn't ask him. I can do as I like now, and as he'll cut me off anyhow, it doesn't much matter."

"When do you go down to Cranston?"

"Don't think I shall go at all. None of us hit it off somehow, and more than ever am I better out of it. I think, though, I'll run down to Wandsborough and have a look round—*incog.*, don't you know."

"Wandsborough, did you say?" exclaimed Venn, astonished.

"Yes. It's the town adjacent to my hypothetical heritage. Know the place?"

"N-no. I never was there myself, but the rector there is an old friend of mine. Ingelow his name is; I'll give you an introduction to him."

"Thanks, awfully. But—er—the fact is, I don't get on well with parsons, and——"

"Oh, you will with this one. He's an out and out good sort. And Dorrien, you dog, he has some daughters.

They were jolly little romps when I knew them years ago, and promised to grow up very pretty."

"Did they? That alters the case. It'll be slow at Wandsborough. On second thoughts, Venn, I'll take your introduction, and will duly report if the promise has been kept. But see here. I'm going to prospect around for a week or two in that section, and I don't want my people to know I'm there, so I've thought of a wrong name. Put the introduction in the name of 'Rowlands' instead of Dorrien. That's the one I'm going to take."

Venn replied that he was hanged if he would. But, ultimately, he did.

CHAPTER III.

"AT FIRST SIGHT?"

THE Church of St. Peter and the Holy Cross at Wandsborough is full from end to end for the great service of the forenoon. It is Whitsun Day and the High Celebration is about to commence.

A noble building is this old parish church, with its splendid chancel and columned aisles and long spacious nave. Windows, rich in stained glass, throw a network of colour upon the subdued and chastened light within, and a great number of saints and martyrs, in glowing pane and canopied niche, would seem to afford representation of the whole court and company of Heaven, whichever way the eye may turn; and here and there, glimpsed through a foreground of graceful arches, the red gleam of a lamp suspended in some side chapel imparts an idea of mystery and awe to the half-darkened recess where it burns.

To-day, the chancel is magnificently decorated. The high altar, ornamented with a profusion of choice flowers and ablaze with many lights, stands out a prominent and striking object, and visible to nearly everybody in the building. Large banners, wrought in exquisite needlework, setting forth the image of saint, or mystery, or some historical event in the annals of Christianity, are ranged around the walls. A perfume of incense is in the air, and, as the great bell ceases tolling, a low sweet melody, gurgling forth from yon illuminated organ pipes, seems specially designed to attune the minds of the awaiting multitude to the solemnity which is about to begin.

The seat nearest the light gilded railing which divides the choir from the nave is occupied by three graceful and tastefully attired girls. Two of them are apparently in devout frame of mind enough, but the third suffers her gaze to wander in a way which, all things considered, is

not as it should be. Not to put too fine a point upon it, she is evidently given to looking about her. But the sternest of ecclesiastical martinets would find it difficult to be hard on the owner of that face. It is a face to be seen and remembered. A perfect oval, its warm paleness is lit up by the loveliest of hazel eyes, long-lashed, expressive, lustrous. Delicate features, and the faintest suspicion of a smile ever lurking about the corners of the sweetest little mouth in the world, complete the picture—a picture of dark piquante beauty which is more than winning. So think, for the hundredth time, more than one in its owner's immediate vicinity. So thinks for the first time one in particular, who, from the moment he entered, has done little else but furtively watch that faultless profile, as well as he is able and under difficulties, for he is nearly in line with the same. Who can she be? he is wondering. Is it the Rectory pew, and can it be that the owner of that rare face is one of the rector's daughters? It may as well be stated that the stranger's surmise is correct.

And now the congregation rises in a body as a long double file of surpliced choristers emerges from a side chapel. Then follow the three officiating clergy in their rich red vestments, attended by acolytes and taper-bearers in scarlet and lawn; and advancing to the steps of the high altar, all kneel. The great organ thunders forth like the surging of many waters, as the first verse of *Veni Creator* is solemnly chanted. Then, rising, choristers and priests advance in procession down the chancel. A thurifer goes first, flinging his censer high in the air, and the lights, borne one on each side of the great silver crucifix, gleam redly through a misty cloud. Bright banners move aloft at intervals above the shining pageant, which is closed by the richly vested celebrant and his attendants. Quickly the crowded congregation takes up the grand old plainsong hymn, joining in heartily as the stately procession wends its way slowly down the nave—a glow of light and colour—and, making a complete circuit of the spacious building, re-enters the chancel. The choristers file into their stalls; the celebrant and his assistants ascend to the altar and incense it in every part, as amid a great volume of choral harmony the service begins.

He to whom we have made brief reference watches the ceremonial with some interest. That he is a stranger is evident, and this, coupled with his striking appearance, is, we grieve to say, a fact which occupies the attention of many a fair devotee there present far more than it should, remembering the time and place. That it engrosses a sufficient share of that of the young lady in the front seat we grieve still more to be obliged to chronicle, remembering that she is an occupant of the Rectory pew. But the stranger does not reciprocate the general attention of which he is the object, for he has an eye for but one face amid that assembly of faces. Stay, though; another there attracts his interest to a tolerably vivid degree, and it is that of no less a personage than the celebrating priest himself; a strikingly handsome man of lofty stature, and whose forking grey beard descends, like that of Aaron, even to the skirts of his embroidered clothing—or nearly so. And in the countenance of this imposing ecclesiastic he detects a strong family likeness to the lovely brunette who first attracted his eye.

The service, magnificent in its artistic adjuncts, and impressive in its well-ordered ceremonial, proceeds. The stately altar, aglow with lights and gorgeous draperies; the solemn chant of the celebrant and jubilant response from choir and organ; the ever-changing postures and picturesque groupings; clouds of incense and the silvery ringing of bells at the culmination of the solemnity—all go to make up an imposing whole. But it is over at last. Choristers, acolytes and priests retire amid a stirring voluntary from the great organ, and the sunlight, intercepted and subdued by lancets of stained glass, falls in a hundred changing gleams upon the now empty chancel.

The occupants of the Rectory pew linger in their seats, and while the other two are busy gathering up their books and sunshades preparatory to a move, the girl whom we have noticed, turning half round, scans the departing congregation. As she does so she meets the stranger's glance and there is a meaning in it which renders her slightly confused—perhaps a little angry.

"Now, Olive dear, we'd better go," whispers a

remonstrant voice. With a start and a half blush the girl recollects herself, and the three haste to follow in the wake of the now thinning crowd, which is streaming out through the west door.

"Ah-h! what a relief to be outside again!" exclaimed she who had been addressed as "Olive," as the three girls wended their way beneath the tall feathery elms which shaded the churchyard walk. "I declare I thought it was never going to end."

"Hush, dear! don't talk like that," answered the eldest of the three, with a slightly scared look around. "If anyone were to hear you, what would be said?"

"That a man's foes are they of his own household," came the reply with a merry, ringing laugh. "That if our dad must give us such a long and elaborate function on so heavenly a morning as this, he might at least let us off a twenty minutes sermon."

Even more startled looked the remonstrant, as at the moment some acquaintances passed within earshot. What if they should have heard!

"It's no use shaking your solemn old head at me, Margaret," went on the first speaker. "I meant what I said, and I don't care who knows it. Now we shan't have time for a walk."

Margaret Ingelow made no reply. She was a fair, good-looking girl of twenty-five, with a thoughtful, refined face. Her bright young sister's levity often jarred upon her uncomfortably when exercised upon sacred or ecclesiastical subjects, for which she herself entertained the profoundest reverence. Left motherless at an early age, upon her had devolved the care of the younger children, and this, combined with her position as head of the household, had endowed the rector's eldest daughter with a gravity of thought and manner beyond her years.

"Olive, look! Who is that, I wonder?" exclaimed Sophie, aged seventeen.

"That" was a masculine figure a little in front on the opposite side of the street, for they had left the churchyard now. Olive, following her sister's glance, recognised the stranger who had attracted her notice in church.

"Perhaps someone down here for the Whitsun holi-

days," struck in Margaret's quiet voice. But for some occult reason the remark was received by Olive with a little frown.

"In other words, something between a cheap trippist and a bank clerk," she said. "No—not exactly."

"Keep your temper, Olive dear," laughed Sophie maliciously. "We didn't know the subject was a tender one or we'd have——"

"Why, what a pace you girls walk at!" cried a cheery voice behind them. "I thought I should have to return home in my own sweet society."

"Oh, father, there you are at last," cried Margaret, stopping as the rector joined them. "We quite thought it would be of no use waiting."

"That tiresome Mr. Barnes always keeps you prosing in the vestry for half an hour," struck in Sophie. "What an old bore he is! I can't see the use of churchwardens at all."

"Our friends at the Radical club do, dear," rejoined her father with a twinkle in his eyes. "How on earth would they emphasise their arguments without a goodly number of 'churchwardens' to smash?"

"Now, father, you know I don't mean that kind of churchwarden, so don't try and be sarcastic," cried Sophie. And the rector burst into a hearty laugh.

It is a pleasant sight that quartette wending homewards along the sunny street already given over to the stillness of a provincial town at the Sunday dinner hour. The girls in their light, tasteful summer dresses looking as fresh and cool as roses on which the dew yet lingers, grouped around the tall upright form of their father, who, with one hand thrust in easy attitude through the sash of his long flowing cassock, walked among them looking supremely happy and contented, now and again bestowing a nod and a pleasant smile in response to the greeting of some passer-by.

"Father," said Olive, thrusting her hand through the rector's arm and nestling up to his side with the most bewitchingly affectionate gesture. "Do you know you're a dear, sweet old dad, and I'm very proud of you?"

"And wherefore this sudden honour, darling?" enquired he, gazing down into her upturned face with a fond smile.

He was afraid to own to himself how he loved this beautiful, wayward second daughter, who tyrannised over him in all things domestic, to an incredible extent. For the fact must be recorded that this one was the spoilt child of the house.

"You sang the service beautifully to-day—and it was worth something to hear you," she replied. "And yet you want to make us believe you are losing your voice—like Mr. Medlicott, who can't even monotone on G without getting flat."

"My dear little critic, perhaps it is that Medlicott has more to worry him than I. Though to be sure he is spared such a dreadful little plague as this," rejoined the rector with his sunny laugh, pressing the arm, passed through his, to his side.

"Oh, indeed! Well then, for that let me tell you you gave us too long a sermon," she retorted.

"Did I? It was only eighteen minutes."

"Far too long. Look now. We are done out of our walk all through that. And just look what a heavenly day it is."

"Poor little things!"

Margaret, turning her head, encountered her father's ruefully comic, mock-penitent glance, and was hardly reassured. She regarded his sacred office as so great—so tremendous—a thing, that to hear him taken to task by this giddy child in his discharge of it always grated upon her. And all accustomed to this kind of talk as she was, yet she felt uncomfortable under it. For she was pre-eminently one of those who took life seriously. But the rector and his favourite daughter thoroughly understood each other.

"Goodness!" cried Sophie, as a neat brougham drawn by a pair of fine greys swept past them. "Why if that isn't the Dorriens' carriage."

"Surely *they* weren't in church!" said Margaret wonderingly.

"Hardly, I think," said the rector, with a lurking smile and a flash of quiet merriment in his dark eyes. "Poor Mrs. Dorrien looks upon the parish church as a very well of iniquity—and myself, the Pope, and a certain per-

sonage who shall be nameless, as an excellently matched trio."

"Old pig!" muttered Olive to herself.

"Why then, it must have been Hubert Dorrien after all," said Sophie. "I thought it was, but he was too far back to be sure. Every time I looked round I caught that detestable eyeglass glaring at me."

"'Every time'—ahem! And pray how many times was that?" said her father, drily.

"Oh, there now, I've done it," cried Sophie with a laugh and a blush. "But it was only once or twice as the procession was coming round, and that was all behind us, so we couldn't see anything of it unless we did look back. Will that satisfy you, dad, dear?"

"Well explained!" said the rector with a hearty laugh. "We must let her down easily on a great occasion, mustn't we, Margaret?"

"But all the same that Hubert Dorrien angers me—he looks so conceited and supercilious always," went on Sophie. "He's a horrid boy!"

"'Boy!' Why hear her! Why he's five years older than you, Sophie," laughed her father.

"Well then he doesn't look it," retorted she. "And he's always tied to his mother's apron-string."

"I wonder what Roland, the eldest one, is like," said Margaret; "the one in America. I wonder he doesn't come home."

"Perhaps he doesn't get on well at home," suggested Olive. "But I wish he would come. He's sure to be nice, if only as a change from his utterly horrid family. And nice people—or at any rate nice men—are conspicuous here by their absence."

The rector frowned ever so slightly—for his favourite daughter added to her other peccadilloes a decided penchant for flirtation. But like a wise man he said nothing, and by this time they had reached the gates of their pretty and cheerful-looking home.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RECTOR OF WANDSBOROUGH.

THE Rev. William Ingelow, Doctor of Divinity of the University of Oxford, had, at the time our story opens, held the living of Wandsborough about fifteen years.

On the face of the foregoing chapter, it is needless to explain that Dr. Ingelow was a very "advanced" Anglican indeed. He was even too advanced for the bulk of his clerical brethren of his own way of thinking, who were wont to shake their heads while declaring confidentially among themselves that "Ingelow went too far," and was likely to do more harm than good to "the Cause" by going to such "extremes" and so forth. He was a regular Romaniser, they declared. Instead of trying to re-Catholicise the Church on good old Anglican lines, he boldly adopted Roman ceremonial in every particular. And his teaching—that, too, was far too outspoken. Invocation, auricular confession, and the like, he taught too openly. English people were not quite prepared to swallow pills of this nature without such a coating of silver leaf as would completely and effectually disguise the salutary medicine within. Ingelow was an admirable parish priest in every way—but—a Romaniser. Thus his clerical brethren.

But the rector only laughed good-naturedly to himself. He candidly admitted the terrible impeachment—even owning that his sympathies, liturgical and disciplinary, were entirely with the enactments which proceeded from the City on the Seven Hills. Liturgical matters in the Church of England had been handed down to them in a state of hotch-potch, and the "restoration on good old Anglican lines" theory of his Ritualist brethren meant every man doing what was right in his own eyes. There must be some rule in these matters, argued the rector. The "Roman Use" was the rule of Western Christendom.

Moreover it was teachable, fairly simple, dignified and impressive, he declared. Therefore he carried it out in its entirety in his fine parish church and was in every way satisfied with the result. His colleagues would fain have followed his example, but lacked the courage of their convictions—Anglican clergymen not uncommonly do. So they continued to shake their heads and declare oracularly that "Ingelow went too far."

Wandsborough Church was old, but in extremely good preservation; a few timely restorations carried out under the *ægis* of its present incumbent had consolidated this, and at the time of our story it was one of the finest parish churches in the land. The beautiful spire boasted a full peal of bells, whose cheery carillon could be heard for miles around, and every few hours would ring forth a sacred tune which, floating melodiously out over the pleasant downs, might on a still night even reach vessels passing far out at sea. The interior of the building was metamorphosed in a trice beneath the new rector's reforming hand. An imposing altar raised on many steps, and decked with tall candles and shining crucifix and rich draperies, took the place of the old tressle-board table with its worn-out baize cloth. The old-fashioned "three-decker" gave way to a fine piece of sculpture and marble, and the bi-weekly humdrum parson-and-clerk duett found itself disestablished to make way for a daily chanted office rendered by rows of surpliced and carefully trained choristers in the carved chancel stalls. The chief service on Sundays and festivals was literally High Mass, being a judicious compound of the Book of Common Prayer and translations from the Missal; and on any day and every day the ringing of handbells and the gleam of lights at the side altars in the early morning told that the rector and his assistants were diligent in the execution of their daily offices. Lamps burned before shrine and saint; the pictured "Stations of the Cross" decked the walls, and altogether it was perhaps little to be wondered at that the Doctor's clerical brethren looked askew, and asserted that "Ingelow went too far."

Now all this was not carried without considerable opposition. There was a hubbub, of course. The parish

raved about "the restoration of Popery." The rector smiled and alluded suavely to "a reversion to first principles." The parish protested—fumed—threatened. A section of it growled, and stayed away; a larger section growled, but continued to attend. The bulk of it, however, ceased to growl, for it discovered that there was, on the whole, nothing so very terrible about all this; then it entered heartily, and with not a little enthusiasm, into the new order of things.

Apart from any intrinsic merit underlying the new system there were many causes at work, all gravitating towards its general acceptance. The rector was wealthy, and did a great deal for the town. He was very popular and very persuasive, and it would be a mere question of time to carry the greater portion of his flock with him. He was a resolute man—not obstinate, simply determined—and where principle was involved he was adamant. Other considerations carried him through. Apart from his reputation for learning—though this involved a wide and general knowledge rather than erudition in any particular branch—he was a man of considerable means, and was open-handed to a fault. The other was his enormous personal popularity, for he was the most kind-hearted and genial of men. He had the same sunny smile, the same cheerful greeting, for those whom he knew to be in opposition to him—for those who went to chapel, and for those who went nowhere. So he was on all sides voted a "good fellow," "the right sort," "a charming man," or "a perfect gentleman," according to the station in life or the sex of his admirers.

A cheerful disposition, like a Grecian nose, is a natural gift, and not cultivable at will—all solemn old cant to the contrary notwithstanding. Given the constitution of an elephant, the physique of a gladiator, the absence of positive knowledge as to the location of a liver; added to absolute freedom from all possibility of pecuniary care, and a thoroughly congenial profession, and it is manifest that if a man is not cheerfully disposed, he deserves to be hung without delay. But where the rector of Wandsborough differed from other lucky ones blessed with these advantages, was that he was perfectly sympathetic towards

those who enjoyed them not, and therein lay the merit of his own cheerfulness. He thoroughly understood human nature. In his younger days he had been a great traveller, having devoted several years to nothing but seeing the world, and deferring to take holy orders until considerably later than most men who enter the clerical state. And the knowledge thus gained of men and manners in varying climes had stood him in good stead, and not least in acting as a counterpoise to a narrow and professional tendency, almost inseparable from "the cloth" in a greater or less degree. And this he himself was the first to own. At the time our story opens, he had turned his sixtieth year; but, on the principle of a man being no older than he feels, Dr. Ingelow was wont to consider himself still in the prime of life.

His family relations were of the happiest kind. His children adored him—the three girls whose acquaintance we have just made, and his only son Eustace, a fine young fellow of twenty, now in his third term at Oxford. Left a widower at the birth of his youngest girl, Dr. Ingelow had come to Wandsborough two years later, and sought solace in his bereavement in thus throwing himself into an entirely new field of labour. What was wanting in a mother's care for the younger children was as nearly as possible supplied by Margaret, the eldest, who was so helpful, so thoughtful beyond her years, that it had never even entered her father's head to import any such lame makeshift as an aunt or a governess into the family circle. Rumour whispered that more than one of the fair—whether maid or widow—in Wandsborough and its neighbourhood would gladly have consoled the rector for his earlier loss, but, if so, much disappointment was unwittingly scattered by him among the gentle aspirants; or if any such stray whisper reached his ears he would laugh good-naturedly to himself over the absurdity of the idea; for, as things stood, there were few happier homes than Wandsborough Rectory.

CHAPTER V.

THE WAG OF A DOG'S TAIL.

WANDSBOROUGH at the period of our story was what might be called an out-of-the-way place. The nearest railway station was fully three miles off, and even that only found itself on a branch line. It would be difficult to account for the existence of the little old town, but that at one time it rejoiced in manufactures of its own, and did a steady trade. Then the tide turned. Foreign products ruled the market, to the exclusion of Wandsborough goods. Factories closed; the stir and bustle of labour became a thing of the past; and the place was given over to a sleepy and respectable quietude.

From the point of view of those who love the latter, Wandsborough was extremely lucky in its remoteness, being almost unknown to tourist and holiday maker. Lucky, too, in having so far escaped the speculator's eye; for though more than a mile from the sea, it was near enough, and possessed attractions enough, to warrant its transformation into that foretaste of eternal punishment, a British watering-place—nigger minstrels, shrimps, donkeys, barrel organs, yahoos, and all. Its country walks were of the loveliest, whether you climbed the heather- and gorse-clad uplands, and drinking in the salt breeze, turned to look back upon the little town, with its red roofs and tall spire, nestling in a green hollow, while on your other hand, far beneath, danced and sparkled the summer sea; or whether, turning your steps inland, you strolled through shady lanes where the ferns and wild geraniums grew amid fresh cool moss, and little brown wrens hopped warily from frond to frond beneath the shade of a miniature scaur. Or if seaward bent, what a wild, picturesque, ever varying coast was there for you to explore!

Down one of the ways leading thither comes Olive

Ingelow. It is a warm morning, almost too warm to be comfortable anywhere out of the shade, although the distant steeple is only chiming a quarter to ten; but one side of the road is overshadowed by tall elms, and beneath these the girl gracefully walks. She makes a very lovely picture, the lithe figure in its cool morning dress moving with the elastic step and ease of youth. A large light straw hat shades the delicate oval face, and the glance of her dark eyes [illegible] over sunlit meadows where [illegible] the buttercups. She carries a [illegible] containing drawing materials, [illegible] reproducing Nature, yet [illegible] basket contain, for is not [illegible] out? She is going to [illegible] herself on the sea shore.

[illegible] she steps over a stile and strikes into [illegible] in the open, there is a [illegible] in the glowing warmth upon her cheeks. She wanders from the path and her dainty boots are powdered with yellow particles from the buttercups which her feet displace. It is a heavenly morning, she thinks; one to make her feel lovingly disposed towards all the world—but—oh! and the girl catches her breath in a spasm of alarm, suddenly remembering that this field is wont to be the abode of a certain grisly terror to the unwary pedestrian, in the shape of a remarkably large and vicious bull. A quick furtive glance round reassures her. The field is empty. But all the same her heart beats pretty fast until she is safe over the next stile, and she is conscious of a lingering, if insane, apprehension that the enemy may peradventure arise out of the earth.

Then the last field is left behind, and a stony bit of barren ground grown with patches of gorse dips to a steep, narrow, staircase-like way, whose rocky walls rise abrupt on either side. Descending this, Olive finds herself on the beach.

She is in a small semi-circular cove shut in by perpendicular cliffs. At quite low tide it is possible to approach or leave it by a narrow strip of shingle at either end, at other times it is only to be gained by the way down which she has come. Settling herself comfortably at the foot of one

of the great rocks which lie scattered capriciously about the beach, Olive pauses to rest and recover herself before beginning to draw. The sea is like glass, now and then the merest breath rippling over it in shades of blue and silver and gold. Brown rocks, left bare by the receding tide, upheave their slippery backs, heavily festooned with seaweed, and the broad level sands lie wet and glistening in the sun. Now and then a large gull, stalking along the extreme edge of the uncovered shore, rises with a scream, and wings its way to the lofty recesses of the cliff. Yonder three or four sturdy bare-legged urchins are busily plying their shrimping nets, and gathering in much spoil from numerous clear pools gleaming amid the green brown rocks. And so still is the air that their voices and laughter are borne distinctly to Olive's ears, though mellowed by distance.

She begins to investigate the contents of her basket. Nothing is left behind? No—colour-box, block, palettes, brushes—all are there; not even the water-bottle forgotten. She will just throw off the upper end of the little bay, and bring in those two great turret-like rocks—whose bases are covered except at the very lowest of tides—and the rough, jagged headland, from which they seem to have broken loose and fled to take up a position of their own out in the midst of the sea. Comfortably ensconced in her snug position, for half an hour the girl is very busy. The outline of her sketch is drawn, and she is ruminating on the laws of perspective previous to the first wash of colour, when lo! another factor appears on the scene—another living thing within the silent and secluded cove. It is a dog.

Careering to and fro over the firm level sands, his snowy chest and ruff gleaming in the sun, and his silky brush streaming out like a flag, he keeps looking upward at the cliffs, uttering the while short joyous barks, as if to say to someone not yet in sight, "Aha—here I am—down first on this splendid beach. So come down after me as quickly as you can, for—it *is* fun!"

"Oh, what a love of a dog!" cries Olive, dropping her work to watch him. "Here—come here, you beauty—come and talk to me, and let's have a look at you!"

The beautiful creature stops suddenly in the midst of his gambols, startled at the sound of a human voice where he thought himself quite alone. Then, wagging his bushy tail, he trots up to where she is sitting.

"You love! You perfect picture!" cries the girl ecstatically, throwing her arms round his snowy ruff and gazing into his soft, laughing brown eyes. "Where do you come from, and who do you belong to?" She kisses him in the middle of the forehead, and lays her cheek against his velvety ear. The dog presses affectionately against her, trying to lick her face with his hot panting tongue.

A low, shrill whistle. The unappreciative animal tears himself from her and stands for a moment gazing inquiringly around. But as he rushes from her there is a metallic sound, and lo! the little tin vessel containing her painting water rolls off the rock, upset by a stroke of his bushy tail, and the contents are swallowed, in a trice, by the thirsty sand.

Olive gives a little cry of dismay as she sees her morning's work brought to a standstill. There is no fresh water anywhere about. She is gazing ruefully on the empty vessel, when a shadow falls between her and the sun. Looking up with a start, her glance meets that of another —not for the first time. Before her stands the stranger who gazed at her so attentively in the parish church on Sunday.

"I'm afraid my rascally dog has done serious damage. I don't know how to apologise sufficiently on his behalf. Pray forgive him—and me—if you can. Is that absolutely your last drop?"

"I'm afraid it is. In fact—it is," replies Olive, and her rueful smile changes to a brighter flash as she looks up at him. "But it was not altogether his fault—nor yours. I called him."

"Oh! He is such a clumsy fellow sometimes, and yet he ought to have learnt manners by now. Here—Roy! Come here, you villain, and see what you've done. Now—what have you to say for yourself, sir?"

The dog walks slowly up with a downcast air and a drooping tail, though the latter is softly agitating in

deprecatory wags. He looks very penitent beneath his master's stern tones, but there is no trace of cowering.

"Please don't be angry with him," says Olive. "It really was all my fault for calling him. But, then, he is such a beauty."

"There, Roy. Do you hear that—you bad dog? Come here and apologise. It isn't often you fall in with those who return good for evil. Here—give a paw—no, not that one—the other."

Sitting down in front of Olive, the dog lifts his right paw and gravely places it in her little hand.

"Now the other!" cries his master—and he repeats the performance with the left, looking up into her face with such soft, pleading eyes.

"There," says Roy's master. "You don't deserve to be treated so generously, you bad dog. And now"—turning to Olive—"will you let me try and remedy the mischief? There must be fresh water somewhere about the cliffs."

"Oh, I couldn't think of troubling you to that extent. Besides I am not bound to draw this morning. I have a book here, and would just as soon read instead."

But this does not meet the stranger's views at all. He intends to talk to this girl, now that a fortunate chance has put it in his power to do so. He can do so while she is drawing—hardly if she reads. So he answers, but without eagerness:

"It will be no trouble at all. And I think you ought to draw this morning, because it is just one of those days which are built for that purpose. You can read at home, but you can't reproduce this perfect bit of coast anywhere but here. So I'll start off upon my errand of reparation before you are angry with me for presuming to lecture you," and picking up the little canister away he goes.

Olive laughs softly to herself as she looks after him. He is so cool and self possessed, and then his voice, too, is a very pleasing one. Who can he be? She hopes he will return soon with or without the water, and not be in a very great hurry to continue his walk. Then she is the least bit in the world frightened. What would Margaret, for instance, say if she could see her sitting in this out-of-the-way corner of the sea shore, talking to a man who is a

perfect stranger? And how the tongues of Wandsborough would clack—a phase of exercise, by the way, to which those unruly members were by no means unaccustomed. Anyhow she can see at a glance that the man is thoroughbred. If he is making any stay in Wandsborough, as she is inclined to think is the case, she is sure to meet him sooner or later, so why not forestall the acquaintance? If he is not, why then in all probability she will never see him again, and in either case there is no harm done. She is thus musing, when the object of her reflections appears at her side, as suddenly as he did before.

"I have been successful," he says, setting down the canister very carefully. "But I am afraid you were waxing impatient."

"Not at all. I think you have been very quick, and I did hope you would be able to find me some water, for I feel in the humour for daubing just now."

"Good. And now allow me to arrange the necessary articles," and without waiting for an answer he opens her colour-box and sets her palettes and brushes in order.

"An artist," thinks the girl. "Of course that's what he is," and on the strength of this inspiration she ploughs away nervously with her brush, though shyness as a rule is not one of those sins which can fairly be laid to Olive Ingelow's charge.

"That won't do," presently remarks the stranger, who is leaning lazily against the rock watching her work. "Excuse me—but you must just round off this outline a little more—it is too hard and steely—so," as acting obediently on his directions the drawing begins to assume life-like shape.

"I suppose you paint a great deal?" ventures Olive deferentially. Who knows what R.A. of renown may be criticising her crude attempts?

"No, I don't."

"But you used to," she persists.

"Never wielded a brush in my life."

"But you seem to know all about it. How in the world could you tell me to make those alterations if you can't paint yourself?" she asks quickly, her incredulity giving way to a flash of not unnatural resentment.

"Pardon me. I didn't say I couldn't. What I said was that I never had."

"Isn't that the same thing?"

"No, because I could—if I tried."

"How do you know you could?"

"Well, since you so mercilessly bring me to bay I am compelled to answer you with a woman's reason. I know it—because I do."

They both laugh heartily.

"And now tell me," goes on the stranger. "What is the name of those two eccentric towers of rock you are drawing?"

"They are called The Skegs. There is a story attached to them, and a ghost."

"Yes? What sort of a one?"

"Well, it's rather an eerie affair altogether. Most family ghosts haunt the family seat. That of the Dorriens seems to prefer the open air. The story is a very old one. Two Dorriens fell madly in love with the same girl."

"Not an uncommon circumstance. And did they fight —or play ecarté for her?"

"Neither. One killed the other. It's a long story, and I'm very bad at telling long stories. I always mix up the people and begin by telling the end first. But the end of this one is that The Skegs are haunted by the murderer's ghost, and that it only appears before the death of a Dorrien. Then a black cloud settles down upon the highest of the two rocks, and those who see it can distinctly hear the wild baying of a dog. And it takes the shape of one."

"A decidedly uncanny, though not original form, for there's no part of the world without that very phase of apparition," remarks the stranger, gazing thoughtfully at the two great rock towers. "Has anyone ever seen this spectre?"

"Yes. When Captain Dorrien was lost in the Alps three years ago, the fishing people in Minchkil Bay say it appeared. They believe in it implicitly. It was seen, too, at just about the time old Squire Dorrien, the General's brother, died at sea."

"And do you believe in it?"

"I don't know. I suppose not. And yet if I were anywhere near the spot at night I'm sure I should be horribly afraid of seeing it. None of the fishermen like to go near The Skegs at night, but I suppose we ought to rise above such beliefs. Even my father won't say he doesn't believe in it, but he always rather evades the subject, so I don't press it."

"Quite right. And who are these Dorriens for whom the laws of Nature condescend to alter their course?"

"Ah! Now you're laughing at my story. Never mind. They are the largest landowners hereabouts and their place is Cranston Hall. It lies in a line with that lofty headland—that's Minchkil Beacon—three miles from Wandsborough."

"What sort of people are they?"

The girl gives a little shrug of her shoulders and makes a distasteful *moue*. "Not nice. At least nobody likes them much. I don't, though I don't know them personally. It's a case of instinctive dislike."

"So you indulge in instinctive likes and dislikes," says the stranger with a queer smile. "A very feminine trait."

Then he relapses into silence. It is delightful to him to sit there in the golden summer morning, watching this beautiful girl with the oval face and expressive, ever-changing eyes. Roy, extended at full length on the shingle, is dreaming, his head resting on the skirt of Olive's dress. Afar off the smoke of a distant steamer streaks the horizon, but for all else the blue sea is deserted. The shrimping boys have disappeared round the rocky promontory, and save for the girl, the man, and the dog, not a living thing moves within the cliff-girt bay. Inch by inch the sun creeps up to where they sit, which spot in a few moments will afford shade no longer.

Then, faintly distant, rings out the chime of a church clock.

"Three quarters!" exclaims Olive listening. "I must go. It is a quarter to one—already."

The last word slips out unconsciously. The morning has passed very quickly in the society of this man whom the merest chance has thrown in her way, and whom she may

never see again; as to whose very identity she is in ignorance.

"Don't go yet," pleads the stranger. "I suppose the regulation 1.30 is the time you must be back by—and it won't take three quarters of an hour to walk to Wandsborough—if that's your destination."

"Yes, it is——" She hesitates. He might as well tell her where he is staying.

"Well, have pity upon a homeless wanderer, and give him and this lovely spot another short fifteen minutes."

Olive yields—but neither talk much. At length she packs up her drawing things and rises.

"Not 'good-bye' yet," urges her companion. "Our ways lie together for a little distance. Allow me to escort you that far."

Without waiting for a reply, he takes up her basket and they slowly ascend the cliff path. Roy, ever ready for a change, starts out of the land of dreams and trots briskly before them.

Olive is rather silent and inclined to give random answers to her companion's occasional remarks. The fact is, she is a little bit frightened at her adventure, and her uneasiness increases the nearer they approach the town.

Just as they gain the road an equestrian trots by, a young man with a pale vapid countenance. He slackens his pace as he passes, and sticking up his eyeglass favours Olive with an admiring stare. Her escort's hand instinctively clenches.

"Who is that—cub?"

"Yes, 'cub,' that's just what he is," answers the girl angrily. "It's Hubert Dorrien."

"Oh!"

Her companion keeps a strange silence for the rest of the way, and there is a slight frown upon his face.

"Here we are at Wandsborough," he says at length, as they gain the outskirts of the town. "I ought to have relieved you of my company before, only there was no means of doing so, as our ways both lay along the same road. Now, good-bye. I shall remember this morning for a very long time. This is a small place, and we are

sure to meet again. I shall look forward to the pleasure of improving our acquaintance."

She flashes upon him a bright little smile, and trips away lightly down the empty street—thankful that it is empty. Then for the first time it occurs to her she has been talking to this stranger all the morning as freely and naturally as if she had known him all her life.

CHAPTER VI.

"MR. ROWLANDS."

ROLAND DORRIEN paced slowly up and down the little garden in front of his lodgings, smoking his after-breakfast cigar, and making up his mind to the discharge of an unpleasant duty.

He had been nearly a week at Wandsborough, and was surprised to find how quickly the days had slipped by. The country was new to him, the weather delightful, and he thoroughly enjoyed his long rambles, with the faithful Roy for his sole companion. Venn's letter of introduction had been duly handed in at the Rectory, but hitherto no notice had been taken of it, a circumstance which did not trouble him, for he was by no means tired of his own company.

The unpleasant duty to which he was making up his mind, was the betaking of himself to Cranston. It would be a constrained sort of a meeting, and therefore unpleasant. He had gathered enough during his stay in Wandsborough to show that his people had not changed for the better. Well, it had to be got through somehow; but he would not betake himself thither straight from here. He would run up to Town, and come down as if for the first time.

His cogitations were interrupted by the voice of his landlady announcing in a tone of flurried importance:

"Dr. Ingelow, sir."

"So sorry I was not able to look in upon you earlier, Mr. Rowlands," began the rector in his bright genial manner. "The fact is, I am short-handed just now, and busy times are the result. And this must be my excuse for calling at such an early hour."

"Not at all—very good of you. Here, Roy—come away, sir—I am afraid that dog never will learn manners. Go

and lie down, sir." For Roy, without even a preliminary growl, had made friends at once with the rector. Indeed so demonstrative had been his friendliness that that excellent priest's cassock bore token of the same, in the acquisition of many white and brown hairs.

"Don't send him away—he's taken to me at once—fine fellow!" said the rector, patting him. "And pray don't throw away your cigar, as I see you were about to do. I like smoke—too well, my girls tell me. And how is Venn? Let me see, it must be many years since I saw him. What's he doing now?"

"Something in the City—stockbroking, I believe."

"Is he! His people tried ever so hard to make a parson of him, but he didn't see it at all—nothing would induce him to become one—and he was right. Venn is the best of good fellows, but he'd never have done for a parson." His father sent him to me to try and get him hammered into Orders, and more than half quarrelled with me because I could take a horse to the water but couldn't make him drink—ha! ha!"

"H'm! Queer people, fathers," said Roland with a laugh, in which his visitor joined right heartily.

"You think so, do you! Wait till you get to my age, and you'll be still more of that opinion. At least, if you're not it'll be for no want of telling."

They chatted for a few minutes longer, and then the rector rose.

"I hope you'll come and dine with us some evening," he said in his easy genial way. "There'll be only ourselves, and we shall be delighted to see you. Let me see—why not come to-night—that is, if you have nothing better to do?"

"Nothing will give me greater pleasure."

"Very good. Then this evening at seven. Now I must say good-bye, for I have to rush about all the morning. So glad to make the acquaintance of a friend of Venn's."

When the rector had gone, Roland was so preoccupied with recalling the strong family likeness existing between his companion on the beach and his departing visitor, that he quite overlooked the fact that the latter had made no

reference whatever to Cranston; rather a strange thing, under the circumstances.

"Well, sir, and our rector's a nice pleasant gentleman, isn't he?" remarked the landlady, while laying the cloth an hour later.

"He is indeed, Mrs. Jenkins. Been here long?"

"Nigh upon sixteen years. Miss Margaret and Miss Olive were little then, and Miss Sophie were a baby. They do say as Dr. Ingelow was dreadful cut up when he lost his poor lady."

"Oh, he's a widower then?"

"Yes, sir. His lady died shortly before he came here, I've heard tell. But law bless you, sir, Miss Margaret, she did for all the younger ones as though she was a grown-up young lady."

"How many of them are there—daughters, I mean?"

"Three, sir. You must have seen them in church, in the front seat of all. Not on the side of the heagle—the other side."

"Oh!"

"Yes, and they're that good—although the two younger ones, leastways, are merry and fond of a bit of mischief. Why when Jenkins broke his leg"—and the good woman launched out into a dissertation after the manner of her kind, straying far away from the goodness of the parson's daughters, which Jenkins' broken leg was hauled in to illustrate—far away even from that fractured, but once more useful, member itself into a great cloud of reminiscence, wherein the speaker's uncle's deceased wife's sister's third cousin once removed and a certain tom-cat endowed with marvellous properties largely figured.

Her auditor gave a weary sigh. In the hope of finding out more about his new acquaintance, he had let the woman's tongue run on, and found, like the ingenious Oriental who invented a steamboat, that having once set it going he was unable to stop it.

Roland ate his luncheon in a brown study. His landlady's gossip had told him what he wanted to know. The girl by whose side he had sat and walked yesterday morning—the girl who had so strangely attracted him in the parish church, was the daughter of his late visitor—and

to-night he was to dine at the Rectory. Things couldn't have turned out better. Yet all this was in the highest degree absurd. What could it matter to him who she was —or indeed if he never saw her again? But that morning on the beach! Bosh! He had not fallen in love with her —not he. He knew better than that. Yet Roland Dorrien, gloomy of temperament and entertaining no spark of affection for any living soul, was obliged to admit to himself that he had thought and was still thinking a good deal about that oval-faced girl with the dark expressive eyes.

And here a new idea struck him. That assumed name had been all very well up to a certain point, but now that he had accepted the rector's invitation it had an ugly look of entering a man's family circle under false colours. He wished now he had never adopted it, but then his plan of staying in Wandsborough *incog.* would have fallen through, and that he did not wish at all. Well, he would let it alone for the present. Perhaps during the evening he would find an opportunity of explaining matters to his host: at any rate to-morrow he would run up to Town for a day or two, and return to Cranston in ordinary and conventional style. That would put matters right.

CHAPTER VII.

"I TOLD YOU WE SHOULD MEET AGAIN."

When Roland Dorrien was marshalled into the Rectory drawing-room, he found himself, somewhat to his surprise, its sole occupant.

A glance around told him that it was a pleasant room to be in. The elegant furniture, the pictures on the walls, the innumerable knick-knacks bestowed about, were all in the most perfect taste. There was that about the room which made it unmistakably clear that its presiding goddesses were refined and well-bred women. It was a bright room withal, as well as a tasteful one. Wide French windows opened upon the garden, and a strong aroma of roses both from without and within hung heavily upon the air.

Suddenly Olive came in. With a start of astonishment she stopped short.

"You!" she exclaimed.

"My fortunate self," he replied, advancing to meet her. "I told you we should be sure to meet again, but I little thought how soon."

"To think of it being you," she went on, her face beaming with merriment over the fun of the situation, which, the first surprise past, she began thoroughly to enjoy. "Margaret told us father had asked someone to dinner, and we thought it was some clerical friend of his."

"I am afraid you must get over the situation, Miss Olive, and put up with only me."

"In that case, seeing that you have the advantage of me, and that there's no one here to introduce us *en règle*—you might—er——"

Voices in the hall, and the shutting of doors proclaiming the arrival of somebody, interrupted her.

"Well, how are you again, Mr. Rowlands?" cried the

rector cheerily. "I'm disgracefully late. This is Mr. Turner, one of my colleagues," he went on, introducing a broad-shouldered young man, shaven of countenance, and in clerical attire, who had come in with him.

The conversation at table was brisk and lively, and what especially struck the guest was the spontaneity and utter absence of constraint with which the girls chatted away—now keeping up a running fire of chaff among themselves or with their father, now poking fun at this or that local character. Then they would parenthesise an explanation for his benefit, endeavouring to sweep him into the fun: and succeeding—as though he were no stranger at all. It was delightful, he decided; and then, oh, horror! —a thought struck him which spoiled all. What if they were to turn the fire of their wit on to his own family, to start poking fun at the members of the same, in total ignorance of his own identity? He must really throw off this infernal pseudonym at the very earliest opportunity.

"How do you like Wandsborough, Mr. Rowlands?" asked Margaret Ingelow, when they were seated at table.

"Oh, it seems a nice little place. One can go about as one likes, independently of everybody."

Sophie spluttered at this.

"Why it's the most gossipy place on earth, Mr. Rowlands," she said.

"I suppose so. Most small places are. But the coast scenery is very fine."

"Isn't it? And the beach, too. Have you been to the beach yet?"

Fortunately Turner was not at that moment talking to Olive, or he would have met with random replies. She was thinking, "Oh, if Margaret should ever come to know of yesterday morning!"

Roland answered in the affirmative and then Turner struck in.

"By the bye, Mr. Rowlands, that must have been you I saw down there yesterday. I was envying the owner of that splendid dog."

Olive was on thorns. Her accomplice, however, was equal to the occasion. Noting her uneasiness, he took up the subject at once, and the narrative of his acquisition of

the faithful Roy soon directed the conversation to the wilds of the Far West, where the rector himself had gone through some stirring experiences in his younger days. During the reminiscences involved, Roland caught a rapid grateful glance from the bright eyes of his *vis-à-vis*. Then he began to study Turner's face, whose owner was listening attentively to his host's anecdote, and came to the conclusion that he did not like it. Moreover he was not sure how much concealed intent lurked beneath Turner's innocent remark. Turner was bumptious—most curates were. No, he did not like Turner. Confound the fellow! what did he mean by looking at and talking to Olive in that familiar and appropriating way—as if she belonged to him, or soon would? But if she should, what the deuce was it to him—Roland Dorrien? Nothing—only these young parsons put on far too much side. Clearly Turner wanted taking down.

"I think you were in church on Sunday, were you not, Mr. Rowlands?" said Margaret, dispelling his brown study.

"Er—Yes. Yes—I was. Very fine ceremony and music too. I never came across anything of the kind before."

The approval implied in this answer atoned for its absent-mindedness and brought a gratified smile to Margaret's face. The speaker had quite won her heart.

Then the conversation became general, and there was a vast deal of laughter and banter, and Roland found himself frequently appealed to, to act as umpire in some ridiculous point of debate, and in fact treated as an intimate friend rather than as a stranger who had not been two hours in their midst, and as he caught the bright, mischievous retort which Olive threw at him over her shoulder as the girls withdrew, he blessed the luck which had thrown him by the merest chance into such a delightful circle. Nor could he help contrasting the probable scene at Cranston at this moment, and a sort of mental shiver ran through him as he did so.

"Circulate the intoxicants, Turner—or, in plainer and more decorous English, pass the bottle," cried the rector, as the door closed on his daughters, leaving the men to themselves. "Fill up, Mr. Rowlands. And now I want

you to tell me about your travels. I was a good deal in the States as a young man. When I was out West, the Plains tribes were not exuberantly friendly. That was even before you were in long clothes, I fancy, ha! ha! but yet we had two or three grand buffalo hunts with them. There's a head upstairs in my boy's smoking den—where we'll go and have a cigar by and by—whose owner I turned over on one of those occasions. Splendid head, and well set up too."

Then these two—the old traveller and the younger one—plunged into a flood of reminiscence in all the delightful *abandon* of a common and welcome topic. At last the rector started to his feet.

"Hallo?" he cried. "This won't do. We mustn't sit too long, or we shall meet with a warm reception in the other room. As it is we shall, so let's face our troubles like men."

His prediction was verified.

"Father, what a long time you've been!" cried Sophie, as they entered the drawing-room.

"How men *can* sit and gossip!" struck in Olive. "Talk about us poor women! When a lot of men get together the sky may fall, but they won't move. What have you been talking about all this time?"

"Rattlesnakes, buffaloes, scalps—nothing worse," cried her father, throwing himself into an arm-chair. "Mr. Rowlands and I have been counting up scalps, and we find he has lifted more hair than your venerable parent."

Roland, manœuvring towards a vacant seat at Olive's side, was disgusted to find himself forestalled by Turner.

He felt more nettled than he cared to own to himself. The bumptiousness of these young parsons was overwhelming. So he took up the thread of their former conversation with his host and tried to pretend he rather preferred it to carrying out his original intention. Tried to, but it was of no use. Yet why should he care because another man sat talking about nothing in particular to a certain person with whom he had intended discussing precisely the same interesting topic? Why, because, dear reader, he was an ass.

But his innings were to come. A message came for the

rector, and its purport concerned Turner too. Roland, in obedience to a scarcely perceptible glance from Olive's dark eyes, at once took possession of the vacant seat.

"What have you done with that darling of a Roy?" she asked in a low tone.

"Left him at home. When I go in he'll nearly eat me. It's worth while leaving him anywhere, if only to see him go mad with delight when I come back. But then, you see, he's only a dog, and doesn't know any better."

"I'm afraid we must defer our cigar together, Mr. Rowlands!" cried the rector, re-entering the room. "I've been called out to a sick bed, and hardly know when I shall get home. But don't hurry away. Turner, you're in no hurry, I know. Good-night. We must have another sporting conversation before long. I've enjoyed a chat over old times immensely."

Turner, however, did not remain long after his host's sudden departure, and Roland, deeming it right to follow his example, also withdrew. But he strolled down the dark street in a brown study, when suddenly there rushed at him in the darkness something which nearly upset him outright, and lo! Roy, who had broken bounds on hearing his master's step, now came springing upon and against him just in time to save that master from over-shooting his own door in a fit of absence, and wandering about half a mile too far. And then there was such a rushing and scampering, such barks of delight, such leaping and bounding, that it took Roy a full ten minutes of exertion to work off the gladness wherewith his affectionate heart was overburdened. But then, you see, he was only a dog and knew no better.

It was long, however, before Roy's master flung away his last cigar end, and looking out into the silent, starry night, wondered what the deuce he had been thinking about. Affected to wonder, too, how it was that his thoughts were still hard at work within the bright home circle he had just left.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HEIRESS OF ARDLEIGH.

"I SAY, Nellie, the ancient couple are getting quite dissipated in their old age. What's at the bottom of it?" And Roland Dorrien, lounging at ease in the stern cushions of the boat, gazed through a great cloud of smoke at his sister's puzzled face, lazily awaiting her reply.

"I don't quite see," she began. "How do you mean, dear?"

"Why, your mother hoped I didn't particularly want to go anywhere this afternoon, because some people were coming. In fact, a regular garden fight. Croquet and scandal, and much chatter."

"Yes, there is. But as you say, they are getting quite lively. Why it's more than a year since we have had anything of the kind."

The two were seated in one of the most comfortable and roomy of the boats, on the ornamental water—whither they had betaken themselves, not to row about, but to get into a cool place and take it easy and chat to their hearts' content. The boat's nose was made fast to a stake driven into the bottom about fifteen yards from the shore and well within the shade of a great over-arching tree, whose boughs threw a network of sunlight here and there upon the brown surface. There was scarcely a breath of air, and at the other end of the lake the coots and moorhens disported themselves, uttering now and again their loud chirrupy cry, and little brown water rats glided from their holes beneath the slippery bank. Roy, whom his master had taken into the boat and treacherously flung overboard, was careering up and down the bank, looking like a great woolly bear, every hair in his body shaken out to its fullest length and standing on end—and barking his surprise and

displeasure at his master's treachery and his own involuntary bath, but feeling worlds the better for the last, while a couple of swans floated in the centre of the pond, looking the picture of ruffled and sullen dignity over the irruption of these disturbing elements into their own especial domain.

"Well, it's rather a nuisance as far as I am concerned," he went on. "As it happens I wanted to go into Wandsborough this afternoon—and over and above that, I hate things of this kind."

"Roland dear, don't go into Wandsborough to-day. Papa will be mortally offended if you do. I happen to know that he got up this affair solely on your account; he thought it would be a good way of introducing you to all the people here. And there'll be several nice girls."

"H'm!"

"Let me see," she continued. "There are the Nevilles, who are coming to stay: the eldest girl is very pretty and the heiress of Ardleigh Court—make a note of that. And the Colonel is such a dear old man. Then there's Isabel Pagnell, she seems to take wonderfully with the men—and the Breretons and ——"

"Bother the lot of them!" cried Roland, flinging the end of his cigar away in a sudden access of irritability. "Roy, don't make that confounded row, sir. Lie down. D'you hear! And now, Nellie, we shall have to quit this cool retreat, for there goes gong No. 1. Yes, it's a nuisance; I particularly wanted to go over to Wandsborough to-day, but, hurrah for boredom instead!"

No more was said as they paddled back to the landing place and made their way along the shrubbery path. Did the girl in her heart of hearts suspect the reason of her brother's anxiety to ride over to the town? If so, like a wise counsellor she held her peace.

Roland had transferred himself to Cranston some three days after we saw him at the Rectory dinner table—now more than a week ago, and even that brief period had been sufficient to convince him that in his former anticipations of the conditions of life there, he was not likely to be agreeably disappointed. The same constraint pervaded everything, the same latent antagonism seemed to underlie all

intercourse, and in a hundred and one small ways, the more risky because so trivial, the general harmony seemed in a state of chronic peril.

One of his first acts had been to make a call at Wandsborough Rectory to explain the circumstances of the assumed name. At first his explanation had been somewhat stiffly received, but it was not in Dr. Ingelow to keep up resentment; moreover, a happy remark to the effect that the *incognito* had been the means of beginning what the speaker hoped he might be allowed to call a valued friendship, which otherwise he might never have known, completed the turning of the scale, and he was absolved all round. Yet not quite all round, for Olive, remembering her free and easy utterances made on the beach that morning, found an early opportunity of taking him privately to task.

"I think you might have told *me* at the time," she had said, "instead of letting me run on with all sorts of local gossip as you did."

"Why? Oh, I see. But you didn't abuse us a bit more than we deserve. I asked you a question and you answered it. And, between ourselves, the answer didn't surprise me in the very least."

"That's all very well, but you ought to have stopped me."

"How hard-hearted you are, when all the others have forgiven me!"

"Have they? Oh, well, then, for the credit of the family I suppose I must exercise the same Christian virtue," had said Olive mischievously. "You may consider yourself forgiven by me too. There."

"One thing more," he had urged, "is wanted to make that forgiveness complete. You must continue to mete me out the same treatment as you did to the stranger, Rowlands; not categorise me as an obnoxious Dorrien."

"That will depend entirely upon your future behaviour," she had returned, with the same mischievous flash.

The lake was barely five minutes' walk from the house, and as the two—the three, rather, for Roy, all the fresher for his ducking, was trotting along at their side—turned

the corner of the garden walk, they came face to face with their mother and two young ladies, who were speedily introduced as the Miss Nevilles.

"We've been in the coolest corner of the county all the morning—on the water," said Roland, catching his mother's displeased glance at his sister. "Nellie wanted to go indoors half an hour ago, but I positively refused to let her land."

"What a beautiful dog! Is it yours, Mr. Dorrien?" said the eldest.

"Yes. Come here, Roy, and exhibit yourself." Roy obeyed, but manifested no great effusion in response to the young lady's somewhat timid caresses. His master decided that Clara Neville was at the moment thinking more of the fit of her gloves and the pose of her head, than of the dog or anything else. She was a tall, slight girl, faultlessly dressed, and in good style altogether; but in spite of the regular profile and wavy profusion of her golden hair, the face was not altogether a taking one—an unfriendly critic would have pronounced it a somewhat cold and ill-tempered one. But then she was the heiress of Ardleigh Court—whose place in the county ranked little below that of Cranston, and this would cover far graver shortcomings. Her sister, Maud, was a quiet, dark-haired little thing, with no pretensions to looks. Yet there were many who thought that a future lord might be found for Ardleigh Court much sooner were she the heiress.

Their father, a jolly, bluff veteran with an ever-ready laugh, was as complete a representative of one type of old soldier as his friend and erstwhile companion in arms, Reginald Dorrien, was of another. The Colonel was the kindest-hearted of men. Cheery, frank and full of life and humour, he was an immense favourite with the rising generation, and indeed with everybody. Everybody except his wife and eldest daughter, by whom—such is the irony of events—the old man's jovial and kind-hearted character went entirely unappreciated. They chose to consider it lamentably lacking in dignity.

"Dorrien," cried Colonel Neville to his host as they sat at luncheon, "is it true that your fellows have dropped down on that rascal Devine again?"

"Yes. Caught him in the act. Two hares, or three—I forget which. He was taking them out of the hangs when they dropped upon him."

"Ah! We must make it lively for him at the Sessions the day after to-morrow. The law ought to empower us to send a regular poacher to serve in the army. Why, when we were up country on active service some of our best men were ex-poachers. Why, Dorrien, you yourself remember poor Wilkins that time we——"

But the jolly Colonel's reminiscence was cut short by his eldest daughter, who appealed to him to settle a divergence of opinion between herself and Nellie. This was a regular tactic of Clara's. Her father was never to be suffered to launch out in reminiscence. Old men, she declared, old soldiers especially, with a mania for reminiscence were always bores. So the exploit of "poor Wilkins, ex-poacher," was destined to remain unnarrated.

Of all the more or less inane phases of entertainment devised by society with a view to doing its duty by its acquaintance, the garden party is not far from being the most tiresome. The Cranston one bore a striking family likeness to others of its kind.

Roland, who hated the whole thing, and wished all the people at the deuce, and through whose head was buzzing a confused string of names—belonging to people to whom he had been introduced—found himself, before he was aware of it, in a vacant seat next to Clara Neville, and almost felt grateful to her for being there. She would do to talk to, as well as anyone else, and he would be spared the trouble of opening up fresh ground. So an involuntary sigh of relief escaped him, which that young lady, for all her imperturbable calm, made a careful note of.

"Don't you play croquet, Mr. Dorrien?" she said.

"I don't. Nothing on earth would induce me to embark in the very feeblest attempt at amusement ever devised by a stark idiot for the scourge of civilised man."

She laughed. "Do you know, between ourselves, I quite share your opinion. The game is, as you say, terrible boredom. But you have been a great traveller, have you not?"

"No. Nothing out of the way. I've knocked about a good deal, but only where everyone else has."

"Ah, you must have seen some strange things. And I think every man who can should travel. Not in the beaten tracks—on the Continent—but in far wild countries where he is entirely dependent on himself. It must open up the mind a great deal, and do a world of good."

"Yes, it has a very salutary and hardening effect; there's no doubt about that."

"I suppose now you are home again, you will settle down for good," she went on. "And this is really a very beautiful spot, is it not? But you travellers are never happy for long in one place?" she added, turning to him with a very engaging smile, the more valuable on account of its rarity.

"Likely enough it'll be my bounden duty to become moss-grown now," he answered with a laugh.

"No, don't move, Roland," said his father, as he rose to give up his seat. "I'm not going to sit down," and there was a cordiality in his tone, as well as in the light touch of his hand upon his son's shoulder, which caused that worthy to marvel greatly. But Roland was glad to be left in peace, so he sat chatting with Clara Neville, heedless of the notes of invitation thrown out to him from many pairs of bright eyes, till at last, feeling bored, he seized upon some pretext to slip away and have a stroll round the shrubbery with Roy.

But the first person he encountered on turning into it was Colonel Neville, who started guiltily, and then burst into a hearty laugh.

"Aha!" he cried, "another defaulter! Come along, my boy, and we'll have our smoke together," and he puffed away at his half-smoked cigar. "We must bind ourselves not to betray each other, unless we are caught red-handed, as I thought I was just now, by Jove!" And the jolly Colonel gave vent to another of his ringing laughs, to the jeopardy of bringing about the very discovery he wished to avoid.

"Don't let's go towards the lake," laughed Roland. "People are sure to wander down in that direction. This'll be our best way."

"But bother it! you've no business to desert the ladies, sir," cried the Colonel, as they turned into an unfrequented path. "It's all very well for an old soldier like me, but you've your time to serve. They'll be raising the hue and cry for you."

"Let them. Fact is, Colonel, I've been so long outside the civilised world that I was dying for a smoke up yonder just now. So the fragrant weed beat lovely woman clean out of the field."

The old man laughed again. He had taken a great liking to this, as he thought, unfairly treated son of his old friend.

"Look here, Roland, my boy," he said, suddenly becoming grave. "I can't tell you how glad I am to see you here, safe home again. You mustn't mind my speaking plainly to you—for, although we've never met before, your father and I fought in the same lines and quarrelled like fury together, over and over again, before any of you were born or thought of—so I don't mind what I say to you. Your father's a queer fellow, but I think he's fond of you in his own way underneath it all, so don't run more counter to each other than you can help."

There was such genuine warmth in the other's address that Roland was touched. He was about to reply, when voices were heard approaching, and almost immediately a footman hove in sight.

"Colonel Neville's horse is at the door, sir," he said, and from the expression of his face no doubt he added to himself, "and a precious long time he's been waiting."

"Ha! I'm afraid they've been looking for me far and wide. You must come over and see us, Roland, as soon as you can. My wife was hoping to have been here to-day, but she didn't feel up to the attempt. So mind you come, for we shall all be very glad to see you."

They had reached the party by now, and many a glance of reawakened interest was levelled at the younger of the truants, but in the slight stir attendant on the Colonel's departure he escaped unscolded.

"Well, Roland," said his father, entering the smoking-

room late that evening. "How did the affair go off to-day? Pretty well?"

"Oh, I think so. It struck me that all the world looked contented with itself. And it made its fair share of row, a sure sign that it wasn't bored, anyhow. Do you mind my lighting up, sir?"

"No, no. Light away. Why yes, I think the people seemed to enjoy themselves. By the bye, you were talking a good deal to Clara Neville. What do you think of her?" And the General stood with his back against the mantelpiece as though about to wax quite chatty.

"She seems a sensible sort of girl, on the whole, and can talk rationally. But she always gives you the idea that she is thinking more of her dress than of what you are saying to her."

"Perhaps there is a little of that in her manner, until you get accustomed to her, that is. But after all, it's a very pardonable fault; more than made up for by the corresponding virtue of neatness," replied this veteran martinet, who had been wont to visit with the severest penalties a single speck on shining boot or pipe-clayed belt when parading his men. "And she is as you say, a sensible girl—a very sensible girl—and she will have Ardleigh Court."

"Indeed?" said Roland, in an uninterested tone. "Are there no sons, then?"

"No. Only those two girls. Clara will come in for Ardleigh, as to that there is no doubt whatever. It is one of the finest places in the county, and adjoins this. You can just see the village away on the right as you come here from Wandsborugh. Ah, Hubert, and have you come to do the 'chimney' too?" as that hopeful burst unceremoniously into the room, pulling up short at the unwonted vision there of his father. "Well, I suppose you two fellows will be able to entertain each other, so I'll say good-night."

For a moment Hubert sat in silence. Then he opened the door and looked out, and returning to his seat gave vent to a low, prolonged whistle of astonishment.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "What the very deuce is in the wind now, that the gallant veteran should condescend

to honour this classic den with his high and mighty presence?"

"Doesn't he ever, then?"

"Never; never by any chance. And so confoundedly affable as he was, too. Well, it beats me."

"Perhaps he's going to turn over a new leaf and develop a vein of sociability hitherto undiscovered. It's never too late to mend, you know," said the other nonchalantly.

CHAPTER IX.

"YOU HERE!"

"BEFORE Colonel Neville, Mr. Pagnell and the Rev. John Croft, Stephen Devine, a notorious offender, charged with snaring two leverets in a field on the outskirts of Cranston Manor Farm"—began the reporter for the local news, scratching away vigorously with his spluttering quill.

The hall in which Petty Sessions were held at Wandsborough was not by its imposing dimensions calculated to impress anybody with the majesty of the law. It was small, low ceiled and badly lighted. Prisoner and witnesses, constables and magistrates' clerk all seemed jumbled up together in the cramped space; while their worships themselves were only separated from the common herd by a long, narrow table. A most inconvenient room in fact, and times out of number had the Bench agitated for its enlargement, or better still, for the construction of another. All in vain. The justices had to go on sitting in the stuffy den, an infliction sufficient to bring them together in a state of ill-humour most unpropitious to the culprit. Even their genial and kind-hearted chairman, Colonel Neville, was wont to wax irritable under the circumstances—while constitutionally sterner stuff such as Mr. Pagnell or General Dorrien was more than likely to err on the side of severity.

"Well, Devine, and what have you got to say for yourself?" said the chairman. There had been no defence set up; the prisoner had doggedly pleaded guilty. Indeed he could hardly have done otherwise, seeing that he had been caught red-handed in the act of taking one of the leverets out of the "hang," while the other was found upon him. The head-keeper of Cranston and his subordinate had just been stating to the Bench under what circumstances they had made their capture; moreover, that the culprit was

an excessively leery bird, who had long dodged the sharp watch they had kept upon him—and now the justices, having conferred together, were prepared to pass sentence.

"Please your warshups," said the prisoner sullenly, "I'd bin out o' work for nigh three weeks, and rent owin', and nothin' to keep the pot bilin' at home. And I set the 'hangs' for rabbits, your warshups, which isn't game, an' I thowt as how that bit o' furze were common land, and didn't belong to nobody. And somehow when the hares got cotched, I took 'em, cos my gal had just come home, and there weren't nothin' in the house."

An eager look came into the man's swarthy hang-dog countenance. He was a heavy, powerfully built fellow of middle height, and his dark complexion and jet-black hair had gained for him the sobriquet "Gipsy Steve;" that, and the fact that no one knew where he came from, or anything about him. Among his own class he was popularly supposed to be "a man who had committed a murder," for no reason apparently, unless it were his foreign and uncommon aspect, and a terribly evil look which would come over his dark features when crossed or roused.

Again the magistrates conferred together.

"Gaol's the word," said Mr. Pagnell decisively. "No fine this time. The fellow's an out-and-out knave, and now he's trying to humbug us into the bargain. Why he's been up numberless times before us for one thing or another, and twice already for poaching."

"But he was acquitted the first time, and the second there was a doubt," expostulated the clerical justice—a kindly-hearted man who, although his commission of the peace was congenial to a harmless vanity, disliked punishing his fellow men. "I think we might give him another chance." So two of the trio being in favour of mercy, stern justice was outvoted.

"Now look here, Devine," said Colonel Neville, "even if we believed every word of your story—which you can't expect us to do, considering that you have already been up twice before us on similar charges—it would be no excuse, and you know that as well as we do. If you can't get work here—and it's your own fault if you can't, because you quarrel with everyone who employs you—the

best thing to do is to go to some other place, where you can. Anyhow, you've broken the law this time and we can't overlook it, but we are going to give you another chance, though at first we had fully intended sending you to gaol. You will be fined ten shillings, that is five shillings for each act of poaching, and costs; in default a month's hard labour."

The prisoner's countenance, which had lightened considerably at the words "another chance," now fell again.

"Please, Kurnel," he began, "I haven't got five halfpence, let alone ten——"

"Well, we can't help that," testily retorted Colonel Neville, who was feeling the effects of the close, stuffy room. "We have dealt with you very leniently as it is. Next case, Mr. Inspector."

So Stephen Devine was removed, and a yokel took his place, charged with cruelty to a horse, then came a couple of disputed paternity cases, the particulars of which, though highly instructive to the student of the manners and customs of the lower orders in rural districts, are in no wise material to this narrative; and so the business of the day proceeded, until at length the three magnates who had sacrificed themselves to the cause of justice in Wandsborough were emancipated and free to return to their respective homes.

"Upon my word, Neville, you do let those rascals down uncommonly easy," observed Mr. Pagnell to his brother magistrate, as the two rode homewards. "Poaching is the very thing we ought to stamp out ruthlessly in these days. Why, that ruffian Devine has simply got off scot free."

"Poor devil," answered the kind-hearted Colonel, who under the influence of fresh air and the prospects of no more Sessions for a month, had quite recovered his good humour. "Poor devil, I believe he's been trying to keep square since his daughter came back. But he'll have to do his month, for he'll never be able to pay his fine."

"Won't he! You'll see that he will, and we shall have him up before us again next Bench day. The fellow's an irreclaimable scamp. Well, our ways part here. Good-bye."

About half way between Cranston and Wandsborough,

but in the latter parish, and in an angle formed by the footpath across the fields with a deep lane, stands a cottage—one of those picturesque, snug-looking nests which you shall see in no other country in the world—thatched, diamond-paned, and a bit of half garden, half orchard in front, and a background of elder trees and high hawthorn bushes. But, for all its external picturesqueness, an exploration of the interior of this abode would reveal a very poverty-stricken state of things. There is a neglected look about everything, and the rooms, bare of all but a few worthless sticks of furniture—too worthless even for the bailiffs or the pawnshop, seem to point eloquently to the sort of person their occupier would be—shiftless, hang-dog, ne'er-do-well, and not unfrequently drunken. It is the abode of Stephen Devine, *alias* Gipsy Steve, whose acquaintance we have just made.

At the moment when that worthy learns his fate in the Wandsborough Sessions room, there stands in the doorway of his abode a girl. Her dress, appearance, and the rough dusting-cloth in her hand seem to show that she has paused in the commonplace but laudable occupation of tidying up, and is there at the door for a breath of fresh air and a look round; and her coarseness of garb and surroundings notwithstanding, the girl would assuredly attract from the passer-by no mere casual glance, for she is of striking and uncommon beauty. Her almost swarthy complexion ought by all rules to go with jetty locks and dark flashing eyes, but it does not. The masses of hair crowning her well-carried head are light brown, just falling short of golden, and harmonise wonderfully with the smooth tawny skin, and her eyes are large, limpid and blue. The mouth, too, is not the least beautiful feature—full, red and sensuous. She is a tall girl, of splendid build and proportions, and the light, closely-fitting gown displays a figure which would have commanded a fabulous price in the slave-markets of old, and the easy, restful, leaning attitude as she stands in the doorway defines the swelling lines of her finely moulded form. A magnificent animal truly, and withal a dangerous one. Such is Lizzie Devine, the poacher's daughter.

The passer-by referred to above would assuredly pro-

nounce her to be no ordinary cottage girl, and he would be right. She had not inhabited the humble abode where we find her more than a fortnight; for she had only just returned from what the neighbours vaguely termed "foreign parts," which vagueness neither Lizzie nor her father were disposed to reduce to definition. Here she was, anyhow, beneath "Gipsy Steve's" poverty-stricken and highly disreputable roof, and the neighbours looked at her askance, as in duty bound. For this did Lizzie care not one rush. Her movements and pursuits were as mysterious as the antecedents of her father. The gossips hate mystery—therefore, said the gossips, she must have been after no good. Some thought she had been "a play actress," some thought even worse. Some thought one thing, some another—but Lizzie didn't care what they thought. Neither she nor Steve mixed with their neighbours—she from choice, he from necessity; for he was disliked and feared as a quarrelsome and dangerous man. One thing was certain, whatever occupation Lizzie had been pursuing, she had returned home with empty pockets, and this ought to have told in her favour, for the ways of evil are lucrative.

She stands in the doorway looking out over the sunlit fields, and her thoughts are chaotic. At first she wearily wonders whether her father will be discharged with a reprimand, and if not what she can pawn in order to pay his fine. Then her reflections fly off at a tangent. Away in the distance, the chimneys of Cranston Hall appear above the trees, and on these the girl's clear blue eyes are fixed, while she indulges in a day-dream. Yet she is a hard, practical young party enough, for she is twenty-four, and has seen a very considerable slice of this habitable globe.

Suddenly her frame becomes rigid, and the blood surges to her face, then falls back, leaving it ashy pale. What has she spied to bring about this convulsion? Only a man, of course.

He is advancing along the field path with an easy swinging stride. As she gazes, a large red and white dog comes tearing over the further stile and scampers joyously past his master. The girl stands in a state of strange

irresolution, her heart beating like a hammer. He has not seen her—one step inside and he will have passed by. But her chance of retreat is gone. While she is doubting, the man passes the gate, and as he does so looks carelessly up.

Roland Dorrien is not wont to exhibit wild surprise over anything, but the start which he gives as his eyes meet those of the girl before him, proves that his astonishment is genuine.

"Lizzie!"

"You don't seem overmuch glad to see me anyhow," says the girl in a hard tone, her self-possession now quite in hand again.

"I don't know about 'glad.' But what on earth are you doing here, and where have you dropped from?" And his eye ran over her from head to foot, taking in her rough, though scrupulously clean, attire.

"Ha! ha! You may well look astonished. Rather different to when we last met," she said bitterly. "But come inside and we can talk. Don't be afraid," seeing him hesitate; "I'm quite alone."

"Oh, that alters the case materially. You see, I never was one to mince matters. Therefore I don't mind telling you that this isn't New York, but a confoundedly gossipy little English provincial place. Moral—One must be circumspect. And now, Lizzie," he went on, sliding into a big wooden chair, "tell me all about yourself—and—and how it is you're trying the *rôle* of cottage maiden—and here above all places in the world."

"That's soon said. I'm keeping house for father."

"'For father'? I don't quite see. If it's a fair question, who the deuce is he?"

"Stephen Devine—and he's now up before the magistrates for catching some of your hares. Yours, mind."

Roland whistled. Surprise followed upon surprise. Surprise one—to find this girl here at all. Surprise two—that she should turn out to be the daughter of Stephen Devine, the greatest rascal on the whole countryside. He had known her under another name.

"Lizzie, I'll be quite candid with you. The fact is, this unexpected parent of yours enjoys the reputation of being

—well, a 'bad lot.' Do you intend to take up your quarters here with him altogether?"

"That's as may be. Didn't you know I was here?"

"Know it? How should I?"

"I don't believe you did. I'm pretty sharp, you see, and the jump you gave when you saw me was no make-believe. I've only been here a fortnight, no longer than you have. I came over in the "Balearic," the steamer before yours. It was queer that we should both have returned home at the same time, wasn't it? And how do you think I'm looking?"

There was a world of mingled emotions in her tones. Distrust, resentment, bitterness, and a strong undercurrent of passion. A stranger would have been puzzled by this daughter of the people, who talked and looked so far above her station. Her auditor, for his part, was not a little discomfited. The first surprise over, the situation held out endless complications. It was one thing for the prodigal in a far country to pick up a beautiful nobody for his amusement—quite another for the future Squire of Cranston to return home and find that inconvenient young person domiciled at his very door, and owning parentage with a skulking, drunken and poaching rascal, at whom even his own squalid class looked askew. A unit in the crowd at American pleasure resorts was one thing; Dorrien of Cranston at home, quite another. He foresaw grave difficulties.

"How do I think you are looking? Why, first-rate, of course," he answered. "Improved, if anything."

"Thanks. I can't say the same of you. I liked you better yonder in the States. I'm candid, too, you see. But you're a very great person here, while I—well never mind. And now I had better tell you. I hadn't the smallest idea that you belonged here when I came—so don't think I came on purpose. I don't want to trouble you or get in your way—no—not I. But I can't quite forget old times."

The summer air was soft and slumbrous, the place was isolated, and the stillness of the dreamy forenoon unbroken by the sound of voice or footstep to tell of the outer world. Roland's strong pulses shook his frame with overmastering

violence, and his temples throbbed as he gazed on the splendid, sensuous beauty and magnificent outlines of the girl, standing there talking to him in tones and words that contained three parts reproach. And she was gifted with an extraordinarily soft and attractive voice. In a second she was beside him.

"Darling!" she whispered, winding her arms round him, her words coming in passionate torrent. "Darling—I could call you that in the old times, you know. Do you remember those nights at the Adirondacks—the beautiful lake and the moonlight—and ourselves? I see you remember. Why not again—here? The cottage is out of the way—scarcely anyone ever passes even—at night, no one. Father is in trouble. I shall be alone here—perhaps for weeks. You are your own master, are you not—you can come—often, always? It was not so long ago—only a few months. You can't have grown weary. No one need know—and when it is dark this way is quite deserted—I don't want to keep you altogether—I don't want to injure you with anybody. But only one week—one short week if you wish it. Then I'll go away—right away."

Her words came in fitful, incoherent gasps, and there was something of the fierce grip of a wild beast in her tight embrace. Like lightning, a consciousness of this flashed through the other's fired brain, a consciousness of his very senses slipping from him. Would he still yield to the terrible fascination?

"Two's company, three's a crowd," is a sound proverb, even when the third is a dog. Roy, who had been lying in the doorway, suddenly sprang up with a threatening growl, and darted in pursuit of a passer-by, barking loudly. The incident was sufficient. It was a rude interruption, but salutary, so thought at least one of the two.

"This won't do, Lizzie. As I said before, this isn't New York, and one can't be too careful. Now I had better go, at any rate. Good-bye."

He spoke hurriedly, and acted on his words before she had time to remonstrate. It was a lame conclusion to a stirring interview. All the better—for him, at any rate.

Left alone, the girl stood rigid as stone. Here was the loadstar of her vehemently passionate nature. She had

spoken truth in disclaiming all knowledge of Roland Dorrien's whereabouts when she came to Wandsborough. Pure chance had brought her there. Once there, however, she was not long in ignorance as to who dwelt at Cranston —and day by day she had watched that field path as we saw her watching it to-day. Now she was rewarded. Well, was she?

Roland, hurrying down the lane to recall Roy, who was attacking the pedestrian with unwonted savagery, discovered with no little surprise that the latter was Turner, the curate; and it struck him that his apologies for Roy's ill-behaviour were received very stiffly. Then it flashed across him—Roy had rushed out of Devine's cottage—that domicile contained an exceptionally handsome girl, and Turner was a parson and presumably knew everybody. Moreover, parsons were always suspicious fellows, apt to ferret out all kinds of things that didn't concern them—apt, moreover, to ride the high horse if permitted to do so. Thus reflecting, Roland cut short his apologies and left Turner, with a greeting every bit as stiff as his own.

CHAPTER X.

"*HOMO SUM.*"

It may or may not be the mission of the fiction-writer to point a moral, in other words to idealise. It assuredly is his function to adorn a tale; in short, to take the world-stage, and the actors thereon, as he finds it and them.

We have said that, in the unexpected reappearance of his former and fascinating acquaintance, Roland Dorrien foresaw a series of grave complications; yet, the first shock over, there entered into his misgivings a widening tinge of satisfaction, and that in spite of the cautious precepts of which he had just delivered himself. A weaker man would have started back in alarm at the turn events had taken and might take—would have persuaded himself that he had made an ass of himself—the male British formula, we take it, for owning that he has done that which he ought not to have done. Not so this one. Whatever he had done he was prepared to stand by, and not a shadow of misgiving entered his mind on that account. But there were other reasons which enjoined to caution. His position, his future prospects, all depended upon how he should play his cards now. And, too, there was another consideration.

He was of a strong, passionate temperament, this man, and the hot blood surged through his veins as he thought of the scene he had just left; thought of his life not so long previously; thought, too, of the opportunity thrust in his path, suddenly and unsought—he who had been trying to persuade himself that the old, wild, reckless times were of the past. But he was a very fatalist, prone to take things as they came, not philosophically it must be owned. Adversity left him gloomy and morose; good fortune, though not elating him, would fill him with a comfortable, if selfish, sense of satisfaction in that he had it in his power to indulge himself in any and every inclination; a

power which he suffered not the smallest scruple to hinder him from using. Not very heroic, it must again be owned. But then Roland Dorrien was no hero, only a man.

Given his choice, he had rather Lizzie Devine were now where he saw her last, and three thousand good miles of Atlantic between them. More than that, he had *much* rather such was the case. As it was not, however, and she was located at his very door, so to speak, well, he must make the best of the situation. It had a best side, he reflected sardonically—which was more than could be said of all such situations. Anyhow, he was not going to put himself out about the matter. A thought struck him. He might cut the knot of the difficulty by paying Devine's fine and restoring that estimable rascal to his hearth and home. That would put temptation beyond his reach at any rate. But Roland Dorrien was not the man to confer gratuitous benefits upon anybody; let alone upon one of a class which, in his estimation, knew no such word as gratitude, and an unscrupulous and ruffianly member of the same, at that. And who shall say that his reasoning was not in the main sound? Confer a benefit on a dog, and he remembers it till death; succour a fellow creature—a human being made in God's image, mark you—and the soul-endowed object of your benevolence will assuredly turn again and rend you on sight. Now no one knew this better than Roland, and with a sneer at himself for having suffered himself to entertain for a moment any such quixotic notion, he dismissed the subject from his mind.

Striking the high road leading into Wandsborough, who should he meet suddenly and face to face, but the rector's second daughter. But she was not alone. Walking beside her, carrying a basket—in a word, dancing attendance on her—was the objectionable Turner.

Many a man under the circumstances would have felt, though he might have shown no sign of it, some slight embarrassment, the result of the old cant "guilty conscience" again. Not so this one. He had rather a poor opinion of the fair sex, and although Olive Ingelow had attracted—partially fascinated him, to an extent which no one had ever succeeded in doing yet, and which he would not own even to himself—for all that, he could not be

otherwise than perfectly at his ease in her presence, even under such circumstances as these.

"Well, Miss Olive," he said lightly, as they met. "On charity bent, I see. Much too fine a day for any such dismal errand."

"There's such a thing as duty, Mr. Dorrien," put in Turner, in a tone meant to convey a lofty rebuke, but which only struck the other as divertingly bumptious. "And the parish has to be looked after, and our people must be visited, one might suppose."

"Oh—ah, I see—quite so!" asserted Roland, placidly and with a stare, as if he had just become aware of the curate's presence. "And I am sure, my dear sir, that no one performs that onerous task more assiduously and efficiently than yourself."

The curate bit his lip with suppressed ire. Here was a man whom it was not safe to snub, whom, in fact, it was not possible to snub. Olive, meanwhile, struggled hard to conceal her mirth under cover of somewhat exuberantly caressing Roy.

"Well, good-bye, Mr. Dorrien," she exclaimed, with a bright, mischievous smile. "Duty calls; and that 'dismal errand' must be proceeded with."

"I never did take to that man," remarked Turner, as they resumed their way. "I don't care how little I see of him, in fact. The Dorriens are a bad stock, and sooner or later this one will prove himself no exception to the rule, mark my words."

"I don't see why you should be so uncharitable," retorted Olive. "We all think Mr. Dorrien particularly nice. How can he help his family being detestable?"

A pertinent question enough, but hardly calculated to soothe the pious young apostle at her side. Rumour credited Turner with more than a friendly regard for his chief's second daughter, and for once in a way Rumour was right. But as to whether the *penchant* was reciprocated by its object or no, rumour was divided in opinion, the balance of the said division being on the negative side.

"He can't help that perhaps," said Turner shortly. "But the man himself is objectionable. A scoffer, and I strongly suspect, an out-and-out infidel."

"And what if he is?" rejoined Olive warmly. "The narrow-minded and uncharitable self-sufficiency of some people is enough to make an infidel of anybody. I vow I hate clergymen!"

The colour rose to the beautiful dark face as she spoke. Her companion, dismayed and offended, replied, looking straight in front of him:

"Not very flattering to your father, Miss Olive."

She rewarded him with a look of withering scorn.

"Just the sort of answer I should have looked for from you. An *infidel*, for instance," with cutting sarcasm, "would have vastly more gumption than not to know that I credit my father with being a very rare and noble exception to a most stupid and narrow-minded set of men. *He* takes people as he finds them. *He* doesn't go out of the way to sneer at them because they don't live in church, especially when he knows little or nothing about them."

The curate would have liked to hint at the discovery he had recently made, or fancied he had made. But he only replied stiffly:

"If I have offended you I am sorry. But as my company seems unwelcome just now, I will relieve you of it at once."

"By all means, Mr. Turner. Good-morning," and taking her basket from him, she passed on her way with a scornful bow, leaving her companion standing irresolute, very savage and sore at heart, looking and feeling not a little foolish.

Meanwhile the object of this tiff, far enough away in the contrary direction, felt more disgusted than he cared to admit. But for the presence of that whipper-snapper of a curate, he would have joined Olive, and in about two minutes would have persuaded her to dismiss her errand of charity to the winds, substituting therefor a long delightful ramble on the seashore, or inland among cool shady lanes, or over breezy upland. And by no means for the first time, either. Now, however, it was probable that Turner would lose no opportunity of making himself a nuisance. Parsons, in Roland's opinion, were extensively given that way, and that Turner had got scent of that other business was extremely unfortunate. Then at the

thought of Turner as last seen, he laughed sardonically. A transparently "spoony" man looked an ass at best—a transparently "spoony" cleric showed up as something extraordinary in the way of an ass—and that Turner was in that identical stage of asininity was obvious to our well-worn friend "the meanest capacity," let alone to so shrewd and clear-sighted an individual as Roland Dorrien.

Another meeting was in store for him that morning. In Wandsborough High Street he ran right against his sister and the Miss Nevilles, who insisted forthwith on carrying him back to Cranston. It was luncheon time and hot withal—a comfortable seat in the victoria was not to be sneezed at, so he submitted to capture with the best possible grace. But the incident reminded him that Wandsborough was a confoundedly small place, and that unless he meant to disperse all prudence to the winds it behoved him to be careful.

CHAPTER XI.

CONCERNING A MIDNIGHT RAMBLE.

"QUIET, Roy, old man! Don't lift up that beautiful voice of yours, or your gallant grandparent will be for abolishing you altogether on the ground that you disturb his slumbers." It seemed hard to restrain the affectionate creature's delighted barks over the restoration to his master and temporary liberty. The dog pranced and squirmed; springing up at his master, and whining in suppressed glee. Then he would career up and down the sward, his white ruff gleaming in the moonlight. His master, however, strolled leisurely on. Leaving the ornamental water on his left, he turned out of the drive into a narrow secluded path through the shrubbery, which soon led him into the heart of one of the home coverts. The pathway lay in gloom overshadowed by black firs; the moonlight throwing a pale band across it here and there, when a gap occurred in the trees. Tangled bushes grew on either side right up to the pedestrian's shoulder, and the air was heavy with a moist fungus-like odour, exuding from the dewy earth and luxuriant vegetation.

"Flap-flap."

Away went a couple of startled cushats from their dark roost in the firs, followed by a dozen more, the flapping of their wings resounding like pistol-shots in the stillness of the covert. Then a faint rustle in the brake, as of a prowling stoat or weasel making off with stealthy glide. Rabbits scurried off down the path, and Roy, tremulous with excitement, looked up in his master's face with an appealing whine, though he knew perfectly well that the least movement towards giving chase would be sternly checked. Suddenly the stroller stopped, and, as he gazed straight in front of him, a faint whistle of astonishment escaped his lips. What did he see?

Only a light.

He had reached a point where the ground fell away in front. Some thirty yards further the covert ended, and beyond lay the open fields. From where he stood the light was visible, and might be half a mile away. Seen through the focus of the narrow covert path it twinkled in the distance, looking like an ordinary candle placed in the latticed window of a cottage—which, in fact, it was.

But whatever it was, after gazing at it in astonishment for a few moments, the stroller turned and began to retrace his steps. As he did so the moon slowly soared over the tree-tops, flooding the narrow footpath with light. Suddenly Roy lifted his head, and uttering a quick, short bark, started off from his master's side, growling ominously.

The path, being in moonlight, enhanced the blackness of the undergrowth. Roland, gazing eagerly in the direction of the cause of his dog's alarm, could discern nothing in the cavernous gloom.

"Poachers," he decided uneasily, with a rapid thought of the long odds against him in the event of his conjecture proving a true one; for only a large and daring gang of such marauders would venture to raid into the Cranston home coverts.

The dog's rage increased. With every hair of his thick coat bristling and erect, he darted forward into the darkness, baying furiously; and in a moment the snap-snap of his jaws, together with a continuous and savage snarling, proclaimed him to be at very close quarters with something or somebody, who had the greatest difficulty in warding off his attack.

"Cawl the dorg off, master," adjured a thick, gruff voice, not untinged with trepidation.

With some difficulty Roland complied, and in obedience to his peremptory mandate to come out and show himself, there stepped into the moonlight a powerful, thick-set ruffian, armed with a cudgel. Mightily astonished, he recognised in the swarthy and scowling features no less a personage than Stephen Devine, the poacher, whom if he had thought of at all it would have been as in Battisford Gaol, doing a month's hard labour, less about ten days already served.

"Didn't expect to see me, eh, master?" said the fellow, with a grin, the other not breaking silence.

"Right you are—I didn't. And now, may I ask, what the devil are you doing here?"

"Thort I was safe in quod, didn't 'ee, young Squire?" rejoined Devine, advancing a step nearer, with the same evil grin. Roy, who had been crouching at his master's feet, keeping up a running fire of growls, sprang up at this move, and with his fangs fixed would have made at the intruder, but found himself held by main force.

"Down, Roy! Quiet, sir! I think you'll be safe in that institution again by this time to-morrow," answered Roland. "Meanwhile, how the deuce did you get out of it to-day?"

"Haw-haw! Mr. Turner 'e paid my fine and got me out. 'E's a genelman, 'e is. 'E said I ort to be at home, lookin' after my darter."

"H'm! A fool and his money are soon parted. However, it's a thousand pities the cash should be so utterly thrown away. Thrown away, because to-morrow you'll return to your old quarters. For trespassing here, you understand."

"Haw-haw! Oh, no, I won't, sir—not I. You'll say nuthin' about to-night—not you!"

"No? And why not?"

"Because," answered the fellow, lowering his voice, but speaking in an insolent tone—"because *I* should have such a nice little story to tell their warshups the beaks, and the laryers, and the parties wot comes to see poor coves tried. I should be able to tell how young Squire Dorrien wasn't above steppin' down to my cottage o' nights to keep my gal company like, while her poor old dad's in trouble. I could tell 'em how I went to get a breath o' fresh air the night I come out o' quod, and as how I see young Squire Dorrien a steppin' along in the dark to see my gal. I could tell as how I follered him until he cotched sight of the bit of light my gal had stuck in the winder to let him know her old dad's come home again, and young Squire wouldn't be adsackly welcome that night—and as how 'stonished he looked when he seed it? Fine gal, my Lizzie, ain't she, Squire?"

"Devilish fine girl! Since you ask my opinion, you've got it frankly, and for what it's worth. And so that's the little story you are going to amuse the court with, is it?"

"That's the little story, Squire. No two mistakes about it," retorted the other, with an impudent leer. "And strike me blind, but it'll be worth doin' another month for the fun o' seein' the old Squire's face when I'm a-tellin' of it."

Roland laughed quietly, contemptuously—and there was something in his laugh that seemed to undermine the other's self assurance.

"You may tell your story, Devine—and then——"

"And then, Squire?"

"And then—you may go and be damned."

The perfect nonchalance of this reply was disconcerting in the extreme. The growing uneasiness which it inspired in the poacher found vent in bluster.

"Blast and blind me!" he snarled. "You don't seem to care over-much. Yer don't seem to have heard of Gipsy Steve. But there's them here as has, and there's them elsewhere as has, and to their cost. So mind me, Master Squire Dorrien, I say, and you'll hear more o' me yet."

Roland slowly emitted a puff of smoke, and watched it mounting in blue circles upon the damp night air. Then he answered with sneering calmness:

"You were perfectly right in saying I didn't seem to care over-much. I don't — and for these among other reasons. In the first place, you won't tell that story, because, if you do, it isn't another month you'll find yourself in for, but several years. Libel, with a view to blackmailing, means penal servitude in this country, remember. In the next place, if you do tell it your daughter will go into the witness-box and deny the whole thing on oath—for even granted the truth of your discovery, I needn't remind a man of your 'cuteness that she would rather see you hung than give a word of evidence likely to damage me."

He paused for a moment, noting with a sneer the fury depicted in his listener's convulsed features.

"Lastly," he went on, "such a tale told by a person of your well-known respectability, friend Gipsy Steve, wouldn't affect me in the slightest degree, since nobody

would believe a word of it, or at the worst would pretend not to. By the way, Devine, were you ever in the States?"

The start, and the sudden lividness of the other's countenance plainly visible in the moonlight, were answer enough. With a slight smile Roland went on.

"Ah, I see you have been there. And that being the case you have an advantage over those who have not—that of knowing who's got the drop. I've got the drop on you, friend Stephen Devine, and I mean to keep it. So you shall be in quod to-morrow, and will have an opportunity of entertaining the Bench with your little romance next Petty Sessions."

The poacher was shrewd enough to recognise the force of every one of Roland's assertions. So he changed his tone to the inevitable one of the beaten rough. He cringed.

"Don't be 'ard on a pore feller, Squire. I only wanted to try your grit—and it's real grit it is. And yer won't 'ave a pore cove up afore the beaks jest as 'e's out o' quod, will yer, Squire. I won't give you any more trouble—I swear I won't. Blind me if I do! Say you won't 'ave me run in, Squire!"

Roland, who could hardly restrain his laughter, eyed the fellow for a moment contemptuously.

"Well, Devine, I'll let you down easy this time, but don't let me catch you loafing round here again. And don't let me hear that you've made any capital or mischief out of this in any sort of way," he added significantly.

"Carn't ye spare a sovereign or two, Squire? I'm mortal 'ard up," whined the poacher.

"Not a red cent. Now off you go, left foot foremost. March!" He was determined the other should never have it in his power to say he had given him money, were it but the price of a pint. "And no tricks, friend Gipsy Steve. Clear right away. Why, the dog here would throttle you in a minute at a word from me—and I'm not sure I hadn't best let him do it—but he'd be certain to get a knock or two over the job, so that it's hardly worth while."

"Good-night, Squire," said Devine sullenly, as he took himself off.

Roland watched the retreating form of the poacher for

about fifty yards, and turned to resume his way homewards. With Roy by his side he had no fear of foul play at the hand of the baffled and exasperated ruffian, and his mind was free to think over the recent encounter. Turner's motive in releasing Devine was clear, and if the curate turned out to be worth powder and shot he would be even with him yet. And the poacher's release was not an unmixed evil—at any rate so it seemed at that moment; for, with this low rascal's voice still fresh in his ears, he felt more than ever inclined to break free from the besetting temptation: as to which it was a case of "needs must"—unless he chose to retain that execrable blackguard in his pay—a thing that he would rather hang himself than do. It struck him, however, that during the short time since his return he had made two enemies, Devine and Turner—the last more powerful for evil, being his own social equal, and because as a parson any mischief he might work would be set down to motives of Christian duty.

Once out of sight, the poacher turned round and shook his fist in the direction of the man who had so thoroughly turned his flank.

"Wait a bit, master!" he snarled through a volley of curses. "Just wait a bit, and blast me dead if I don't cut that fine cock's-comb of yours one of these days. And if I don't, call me a blanked sodger!"

Whether he did or did not earn that martial appellation will hereinafter appear.

CHAPTER XII.

"THE SKEGS."

"FATHER, I'm going down to Minchkil Bay to look up some of your ancient mariners."

"Are you, dear?" said the rector, glancing up with a pleased smile at Olive, as she stood in his study door attired for walking, and making the sweetest possible picture in contrast to the somewhat solemn and ecclesiastical fittings of the old room. "And are you going alone?"

"Yes, I am. Margaret says she has more than she can do this afternoon, and, besides, those dear old fishermen are my speciality, so I intend to get the credit of keeping them in the way wherein they should go."

"Ha-ha! The English of which is, that that basket which I see is going down there full of tobacco and snuff and tea, and coming back empty. You know the way to their hearts, you little witch," laughed the rector, in reality pleased that this volatile favourite child of his should of her own accord undertake a work of benevolence—for anything in the shape of visiting was not her forte. "But I predict that you'll get a soaking before you're home again."

"Now be quiet, you dear old 'croaker.' I shall get nothing of the kind, for the afternoon is turning out quite fine," she answered, leaning over him with her arm on his shoulder and looking down on his desk. "And now I'll leave you to your sermon-brewing—but oh!—this'll never do. You really mustn't write so badly, dad dear, or you'll stick hopelessly, as you did last Advent—and everyone was making merry over the notion of the preacher not being able to read his own notes."

"Out upon you for a profane person who dare to invade my *sanctum sanctorum*," cried her father gleefully, as

leaving a shower of kisses upon his forehead the girl sped from the room.

Left to himself the rector unconsciously let fall his pen.

"God keep my darling—and grant her a happy future," were the words his thoughts would have taken. But with him we have no concern at present, so shall leave him to his meditations.

The little fishing colony in Minchkil Bay lay distant a mile and a half from Wandsborough. Its main features were roughly built cottages, sorrily kept potato plots, pig-sties, and smells. The place seemed to have been dropped in a little hollow at the mouth of an attempt at a river, whose chronic state of "drainiess," combined with a whiff of fish in every stage of staleness, not to say putrefaction, engendered the savoury atmosphere aforesaid. There was a good beach, of course, with the regulation complement of weatherbeaten craft, when the latter were not at sea, that is—eke the regulation nets, corks and other fishing gear hanging about on poles. On one side, the high ground beyond which lay the town of Wandsborough; on the other a bare, turfy slope rose abruptly to the summit of Minchkil Beacon, nearly four hundred feet in the air, and whose rugged face to seaward consisted of a succession of almost perpendicular cliffs, broken by many a ledge, where the gulls had everything their own way.

The task which Olive had set herself was anything but congenial. However, she went through with it bravely, and for upwards of an hour she steeled herself to endure the smokiness of the cabins and the ancient and fish-like smells, the maunderings of the old crones and the distracting yells of the babies, without flinching. She had a bright smile and a cheerful word for all as they grumbled or whined—according to temperament—that it was "mortal long since she'd bin near them," and pretended to think it was not one word for herself and six for the basket she carried, but the other way about. She endured all this right manfully, and when it came to an end, with a sigh of relief, she tripped lightly down the beach to revel in the fresh sea air and a sense of duty done.

"Well met!"

She started at the voice—a genuine start. Truth to tell she coloured.

"This is a piece of luck," went on the speaker. He had been talking with one of the men, and both being behind a large fishing boat, Olive had not noticed them. "I had no idea any of your flock pastured here."

"Yes, they do. But it isn't often I do anything in the way of shepherding them. That isn't in my line at all. In fact—I—I hate it."

The candour of this avowal was delicious. They both burst out laughing.

"I can more than half believe that," he said. "But then why don't you delegate the *rôle* of Lord High Almoner to someone else? There's Turner, for instance. It would be just in his line, I should think."

A queer look, a wicked look, came into the girl's face at the mention of Turner.

"He wouldn't undertake it for me. He's angry with me. Mr. Dorrien, don't you hate clergymen?"

"Truth compels me to state that I'm not partial to them as a rule."

"Oh, indeed? And why don't you look shocked at my question and say, 'Er—not very flattering to your father, is it?' or something to that effect? That's how you ought to retort, by every known rule," said Olive, wickedly demure.

"And why don't you look shocked at my answer and say, 'Er—kindly remember that you are reflecting on my father'? That's how you ought to retort, &c., &c."

"Because," answered Olive, when she had recovered from the laughter into which his quizzical reply had launched her, "because I know you were making an exception in his favour as well as you knew I was. So we are agreed on that head."

"Quite so. There's nothing like a good understanding to begin with. And now by way of trying whether it'll continue, let's see if you'll fall in with my idea. We must go for a sail. How does that idea strike you?"

"As perfection," she rejoined, looking up at him with a light laugh. "Jem Pollock has the lightest boat here, but even that's a shocking tub."

It was. By the time they had put a couple of hundred yards between themselves and the beach Roland was fain to admit the justice of the stigma.

"Where are we going to?" asked Olive, as he suddenly turned the boat's head and coasted along the shore.

"The Skegs. I've set my heart on exploring that pinnacle of scare, and was waiting until you could go with me. You were the first to unfold its dread mysteries, and you shall be the first to aid me in braving them."

"Oh! But—I'm just the very least little bit afraid."

"Naturally."

"It's fortunate—or unfortunate—you didn't say where you intended going, or Jem Pollock wouldn't have let us have his boat for love or money."

"He wouldn't?"

"Not he! They're all in mortal terror of the place. To land there would bring them ill-luck for life. They even think they would hardly leave the rock alive. A boy was killed there once trying to get at some sea gulls' nests. They put it down to his temerity in landing there at all."

"A set of oafs! Well, *we* are going to land there—the tide is just right for it—and I wager long odds we don't come to grief in any sort of way. Village superstition will receive a salutary check—and I, even I, shall place your father under a debt to me for my share in exploding such a pagan relic. Look," he broke off, "there would be a good drop for a runaway horse or anyone tired of life."

A bend in the coast-line had shut out the fishing village behind them, for they had come some distance along the shore. The face of the cliff at this point rose sheer for a couple of hundred feet, where its surface was broken by a narrow ledge like a mere goat-path. Above this it slanted upwards to nearly twice that height.

"It would, indeed," assented Olive. "That rejoices in the name of Hadden's Slide."

"Does it? And who was Hadden, and what the mischief possessed him to try his hand at tobogganning on such a spot?"

Olive laughed. "Nobody knows. It is an old landslip, and it is supposed that a cottage belonging to one

Hadden was carried away with it. But that is very old tradition."

"A pity. I had quite thought another spectral wanderer had lighted on the place for his posthumous disportings, like my ancestor yonder at The Skegs."

"Well, he would have a better right, for that is your property."

"My property!"

"Yes. It is a part of Cranston," answered Olive, looking surprised.

"Oh—ah! I see. But you said *my* property. Now Cranston is not *my* property, and very likely never will be."

This remark was made with a purpose. How would that strike her? he thought, and he watched her narrowly. But, however it happened to strike her, she took care that he should be none the wiser.

"Why do you take me up so sharply?" she expostulated with pretty mock petulance. "Really I shall become quite afraid of you if you are going to be so precise. One can't always think for five minutes or so before making every innocent little remark. Now can one?"

"Of course not. What's that extraordinary looking fissure there in front? It seems as if a stroke of lightning had split the whole cliff from brow to base."

"That is Smugglers' Ladder. It is well worth seeing. I've only been there once. We must make up a picnic and go there some day. Are you fond of picnics, Mr. Dorrien?"

"Passionately—under some circumstances. But can't we get as far this afternoon?"

Olive looked dubious.

"It's a long way. Further than it seems. And father was right. It's coming on to rain."

"So it is. Here we are at our destination, though, and we can shelter under the rock."

Great drops began to plash on the water, and the cliffs above looked dim as through a mist. The tallest of The Skegs reared up its lofty turret overhead, the sea washing over a narrow sloping ledge of rock at its base with a hollow plash. This was the only landing place.

The landing was a good deal more difficult than it

looked. There was something of a current swirling round the rock, and the boat, as it got within the recoil of the waves, danced about in lively fashion. Olive, a little over-awed at finding herself for the first time in this uncanny place, looked about her in a half-scared, half-subdued manner, as if she expected to behold the spectral hound start open-mouthed from the waves. Then enjoyment of the adventure dispelled all other misgiving.

"Just in time," she remarked gaily, as, her companion having secured the boat, they gained the desired shelter. A violent downpour followed, beating down the sea like oil. Not a soul was in sight on the lonely and desolate beach, and away on the horizon great cloud banks came rolling. Our two wanderers—three rather, for Roy was not slow to assert his claim—made the best they could of the limited shelter, contemplating the rushing deluge a yard in front of them with the utmost equanimity.

"May as well make ourselves snug while we can. I shall venture to smoke."

"One of your many advantages over us poor women. Well, why do you look so astonished? Isn't it?"

"Why do I look astonished?" echoed her companion lazily and between the puffs as he lighted up. "Oh, only because one seems to have heard that sentiment before."

"Well? And then?"

"And then? Oh—and then—I suppose it astonished me to hear a threadbare sort of a commonplace proceed from you. That's all."

Olive tried to feel angry. She could not even look it, however. The tell-tale laugh rose to her eyes, curved the witching little mouth—then out it came.

"Do you know—you are very rude? At least I ought to tell you so——"

"Another commonplace."

"Why you deliberately snubbed me!" she went on, taking no notice of the murmured interruption. "Snubbed me like a brother. Shut me up, in fact."

"Cool hands, brothers—stick at nothing. Ought to know. One myself. But, I say, wasn't it odd how we first ran against each other that morning—you and I—when you were drawing?"

Now there was nothing in the foregoing conversation as set down on cold-blooded and unfeeling paper which all the world and his wife might not have heard. Nothing in the words, that is. But were that conjugal impersonality within earshot of these two people coasting along a dismal and desolate seashore at imminent peril of a wetting through, or crouched under the rock to avoid it, much gossip might it have chucklingly evolved, merely from the tone of their voices. For the said tone had that subtle ring about it which meant that the owners of these voices were fonder of each other's society than either would admit to the other—or possibly to him or herself. And it happened that they had enjoyed a good deal more of that society than was known to anyone outside the mystic circle of three, that mystic three bound together in a tacit bond of fellowship—the safer that the third factor in this sodality was by nature denied the gift of human speech. The summer weather was delightful. Meadow and down, country landscape and breezy seashore, were open to all. A chance meeting, such as that of to-day, developed into a ramble more or less protracted, in the most natural way in the world. What more natural either, than that such chance should by some occult and mysterious process have a way of multiplying itself until matters should have reached such a point that the issue would be momentous for weal or for woe to one or both of these two? And then to think that all this should have dated from the too exuberant wag of a dog's tail.

"And wasn't it a shame that you should have led me on to talk about your people—and—and—'kept dark'—isn't that what you call it?"

"It was rather a sin," he answered languidly. "Good discipline, though. Won't do the confidence trick again to divert the insinuating stranger."

Olive made no reply. She was thinking what a pickle she would get into if her afternoon's pastime should transpire. But there was a strong spice of the dare-devil in her composition, and life at Wandsborough was apt to strike her as dull at times. And——

And what?

Never mind what—at present.

So they sat there and talked, heedless of time, and suddenly a gleam of sunshine straggled through the curtain of cloud. The rain had ceased, and behind them, to seaward, the squall, which had now passed, rolled further and further away.

"Now I shall go and prospect for the relics of my ghostly ancestor," said Roland. "If you don't mind waiting, I'll be with you again in a few minutes."

"Why? Where are you going?"

"To ascend this—er—Skeg."

"But I want to go too. You must not expect to keep all the honour and glory of this hairbreadth adventure to yourself."

"You want to go, too! H'm! You'll slip or turn giddy. The way is infamous."

Both stood gazing at the wretched slippery path that wound up and around the great rock.

"Oh, don't be afraid," she said. "It isn't the first time. I crossed Hadden's Slide once, and that's far worse than this."

"You, never having seen this, are of course an authority."

"Rude again," she laughed. "Now let me have my way."

Shaking his head dubiously, he allowed her that privilege. But more than once as they came suddenly upon a great yawning rift where the path had fallen away, revealing a perfect *abattis* of jagged rocks beneath, which, although at no great depth, were sufficiently far down to dash either of them to pieces like an egg-shell, in the event of a slip, he began to wish he had never allowed her to come. Olive, however, seemed to revel in the danger. Her face was flushed with the glow and excitement of the adventure, and her dark eyes shone and sparkled with exhilaration.

They had attained a height of some fifty feet and were stopping to rest. Roy had been left below, his master having entrusted him with something to keep watch over. Two small craft were tacking to and fro on the dull, leaden waters, at some distance off, and a grey-backed gull or two floated stationary against the wind, which, increas-

ing in threatening puffs as they rounded a projecting angle of the rock, tended not to render their perilous foothold any the more secure.

The sky was again growing overcast, and the melancholy and hollow moaning of the waves beneath, swishing and swirling round many a submerged reef, produced a most dismal and depressing effect. Olive, with the dour legend running in her mind, now longed to get away from the place. Her companion seemed in no such hurry.

"This is about as far as we shall manage to go," he remarked, scrutinising the rock overhead. The ledge on which they stood was barely a yard in width. Olive, peering over, noted that at that point the drop was sheer, and looking down upon the pointed reefs with the milky foam seething through and over them—shuddered.

"Take care!" he warned, holding her hand to steady her. "Better come down now, before you begin to feel nervous." He had felt her hand tremble.

"Perhaps we had. Hark! What is that?" she broke off in an awed whisper.

Even her companion could hardly repress a start of astonishment. Apparently from within the rock itself came the deep-mouthed voice of a dog. Olive turned as white as a sheet. The terrible spectre of The Skegs was her only thought.

To her surprise the other burst out laughing.

"Not the ancestor this time," he said. "It's only good old Roy. He's getting tired of his own company down there, and is remonstrating. Possibly, too, he has an eye on some stray crustacean which invites assault, but that he will not desert his post."

Olive was immensely relieved. The colour came back into her pale cheeks and she tried to laugh, succeeding a little hysterically, it must be owned. She had been a good deal scared, and, all things considered, there was some excuse for her. This lonely rock, banned by popular superstition, was dread and forbidding enough in itself. Add to this the gloomy sky and the moaning sea; the rather precarious descent yet lying before them; and remember that the spectral hound was believed in as firmly among the seafaring population as the Deity Himself, and a great

deal more feared; that disaster, more or less grave—and sometimes, according to that belief, fatal—had overtaken those upon whose ears the spectral voice had fallen; and it follows that if the girl was momentarily unnerved by a weird and mysterious howl, which, owing to some acoustic peculiarity in its formation, seemed to come from *within* the haunted rock itself, there was every excuse for her.

"How ridiculous of me to forget all about Roy!" she said. "But anyhow, let us go down now."

"We had better," assented he quietly. A very uncomfortable misgiving had flashed across his mind. Far away over the sea a black curtain of cloud was approaching rapidly, its advance marked by a line of troubled water breaking into white foamy crests. He knew that a violent squall would be upon them in a few minutes—and if it caught them on that wretched ledge their position would be horribly dangerous.

"Let me get past you!" he said in an unconcerned voice.

"There; now if you should chance to slip I can easily catch you. We had better get back to Minchkil rather soon, in case the wind rises."

"Oh dear, I forgot that. It looks dreadfully rough already. I feel almost afraid to get into the boat again. Couldn't we wait until Pollock comes to look for us? He is sure to do so when he finds we don't come back."

"Not to be thought of. In half an hour the tide will be all over the landing place. To use a succinct and expressive metaphor, it's a case of 'between the devil and the deep sea.' Careful here!" he enjoined warningly, holding out his hand to help her over a place where the path had fallen away, leaving an ugly and formidable gap, up which the waves were now shooting in clouds of misty spray.

All would have gone well, but just at the moment of stepping across this gap, a piercing, unearthly shriek rang out in their very ears, as something cleft the air with a swirl and a rush almost between their faces. Olive, already unnerved by her former alarm, uttered a quick gasp, and an ashen pallor spread over her features. For a fraction of a moment she stood tottering; then her eyes closed, she swayed heavily and—a strong arm was flung round her and she was held firmly against the cliff.

"Don't look down, Olive. You're quite safe now. Keep perfectly cool and do exactly as I tell you."

The prompt, commanding tone was effectual. And even then, in the moment of her peril, the girl realised that he had called her for the first time by her Christian name. The convulsive shuddering left her frame, which relaxed its terror-strained rigidity. Obeying his directions implicitly, she kept with him step by step, supported by his ready arm, till they reached the slab of flat rock on which they had landed. Meanwhile two great gulls, the cause of what was within an inch of being an awful catastrophe, circled around and around their disturbed eggs, uttering their harsh and peevish shrieks. Roy, whom they found whining uneasily, jumped up in delight. Once in the boat, however, he lay perfectly still. He was not at his ease though, poor fellow, and began to feel uncomfortable, like a Frenchman crossing the Channel.

"There, it's even as I told you," said Roland, as having with some trouble effected a successful embarkation, he rested for a moment on his oars. "The 'landing stage' will be entirely covered in a few minutes. We were scarcely half an hour on the island, and it was as long as we could have stayed. It's an abominably dangerous place, all the same, and I don't wonder the people funk it. The little 'Skeg' isn't landable on at all."

He had hoisted the sail and they were scudding rapidly before the wind. Olive, looking back at the great rock towers, shuddered. The sea was rising momentarily, and long hillocks of dull green water swept on—line upon line—gathering into knife-like crests to roll and break into surge upon yonder shore. From seaward came the moan of the rising gale, and already the faces of the great cliffs were dim and misty. A dire and blood-curdling suspicion was in her mind. What if it had been the terrible spectre voice after all—and not poor Roy's honest bay? Her own narrow escape, immediately afterwards, looked ominously significant. She heartily wished they were safe home again.

Splash! Whish!

The boat careened over, dipping her gunwale. The squall was upon them. Roland, with one anxious glance to windward, turned all his attention to the little craft, con-

trolling the tiller with a firm and judicious hand. White crests leaped around them with an angry hiss, the stunning whirl of the blast was in their ears, and overhead the mast danced madly against the wrack-driven sky. Either the gear must carry away or they must capsize. Great streamers of cloud, like horizontal waterspouts, darted across the sky, and there was wild exhilaration in the breath of the salt scud driven before the squall as they stormed along through the white and seething crests. He had dreaded this squall. Now it was upon them he enjoyed the fierce excitement of it. Suddenly the boat careened again, shipping something of a sea. Olive uttered a cry of dismay.

"Don't be frightened, Olive," he said, throwing an arm round her in support, for she nearly lost her balance in the furious rocking of the boat. "Why, I could land you on shore at any point I chose, even if we did capsize. I should rather enjoy the swim than otherwise, and I believe you would, too."

A blush came into the girl's face. She had caught some of his exhilaration, and gazed fearlessly at the tumbling seas. Her cheeks were wet with the salt spray, and a soft, dark tress which had escaped from its fastening kept blowing across her eyes. Very beautifully did the excitement, dashed with a tinge of apprehension, become her.

"No—I am not afraid," she answered—"with you."

These two young people were getting on, you see.

A whirr overhead—a hurtling rush—and a wild hailstorm swept down upon the sea, curbing its fury slightly, and rendering the inmates of the boat very uncomfortable. Poor Roy, whom his master had disposed in such place as to afford the best ballast, looked simply piteous. He shivered, and in his wistful, patient eyes there was a mute appealing look, which his master noticing, could not restrain a laugh at.

"Never mind, Roy, old chap. You'll be as right as ninepence directly! Now for it! Kill or cure!" he cried, bringing round the boat's head a point and a half.

A confused whirl, an upheaval as if they had left the water altogether; and—they were in the comparatively smooth water of Minchkil Bay, and running

comfortably for the little fishing village. A few moments later and half a score of stalwart hands had hauled them up high and dry on the beach.

"All's well that ends well!" cried Roland, helping his companion to alight.

"You're in tremenjious luck, sir, that's all I've got to say about it!" said the owner of the boat dryly. "Never thought you'd have got back without a bath."

"Ha-ha! In luck are we, Jem Pollock? Glad to hear you say so, because according to all the rules of that humbugging old superstition of yours we ought to have come to mortal grief. We've been exploring The Skegs."

The man started, and queer looks were exchanged among the group.

"Did you land there, sir?" he asked uneasily.

"Land there? I should rather think we did. Climbed nearly to the top of the rock—as far as we could get. Then ran home at a ripping pace in a thundering squall and a good deal of a sea. So you see, Pollock, on your own admission, the spectre of The Skegs is a fraud of the first water. No ill luck has ensued to us from it—has it now?"

"I devoutly trust it never may, sir," answered the fisherman in a queer tone.

"And by the way, Pollock, that's a first-rate little craft of yours. She behaved grandly. You should have seen her run just before we rounded the point yonder. Perhaps she was eager to get away from The Skegs, ha-ha! Well, good-day, my men. Now drink my health, and confusion to my ancestral ghost," and leaving a substantial largesse with them, he turned and joined Olive.

Was there yet time before they reached home for some foretaste of that ill luck predicted by the superstitious fishermen? Let us see. They were in great spirits as they struck across the down, turning now and again to look back at the storm-lashed sea, and mark how The Skegs were now almost hidden in clouds of spray as the flying waves leaped high against their slippery sides. At length, as they reached the last stile a rumble of approaching wheels was audible on the high road. Now this stile was in a shaky condition, consequently a piece of the woodwork gave way as Olive was in the act of crossing.

She must have had a nasty fall, but for the two ready hands prompt to set her securely on her feet. Just then an open carriage swept round the bend of the road from the direction of Wandsborough. So rapidly did it whirl past that Roland had not time to do more than recognise its occupants; yet in that brief moment he took in everything—the pair of high-stepping bays, the silver crest on the harness, even the identity of the men on the box. But what he took in most surely of all was the expression of furious anger through which his father had regarded him, and the no less hostile look on the cold impassive face of his mother.

CHAPTER XIII.

BREAKERS AHEAD.

"I SAY, Nell," said Hubert Dorrien, coming into the morning-room, where his sister sat alone. "What the very dickens is wrong now? The veteran's in an exemplary state of grumps."

"Well, he isn't particularly amiable this morning; but then he isn't always, you know," answered Nellie.

Hubert shook his head moodily.

"Ah, yes, but there's something in the wind. He's far worse than usual, and now he and the missis are hob-nobbing together in the library. Now, Nell, be a good girl and tell a fellow what it's all about."

"But, Hu, I give you my word I haven't an idea. It may be nothing, after all."

"Pooh!" exclaimed her brother irascibly. "I believe you do know, though. You women dearly love beating about the bush and all that sort of thing," and throwing his leg over the arm of a chair, he flung himself back, his face a picture of unreasonable peevishness. Nor could he afford to await with indifference the paternal storm, for Master Hubert's conscience was a tolerably blemished article, and now he was speculating with a troubled mind as to which of his peccadilloes might have come to the paternal knowledge.

The girl made no reply, as she bent over her work, while her brother sat uneasily swinging his legs, the apprehensive frown deepening on his brow. Then they heard the door of the study open and their father's voice saying:

"—And send Hubert here; I want to talk to him. If he is out, he had better come directly he returns." And the door closed as Mrs. Dorrien replied in the affirmative.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Hubert. "Well, it's of no use putting off the evil day. Here goes. Oh, it's nice to

have a father! Well, mother, and what's it all about?" as Mrs. Dorrien entered the room.

"I don't know for certain, dear," she said anxiously. "But I think your father only wants to talk to you about your allowance."

A very blank look came into his face. "Couldn't be much worse," he muttered, and went to meet his fate.

And soothly, a bad quarter of an hour was in store for him, for it happened that the General had received certain bills on his account—not University duns, but long outstanding London debts, and, as to one, a letter of demand. Cold, sarcastic and incisive was the lecture he poured forth on the head of the luckless Hubert. He reminded him of former scrapes of the kind, of the fact that he would have little or nothing hereafter but what he obtained by his own exertions, and wound up by recommending him to apply himself to his reading with renewed determination.

Hubert, who thought he was getting into smooth water again, began to promise, but once more his father cut him ruthlessly short.

"And now, for the third time," he said, "I shall have to get you out of the embarrassment into which your own folly has plunged you—but I shall not do so without exacting some guarantee that you will make a good use of your time in return. Your mother tells me that you and Roland are invited to spend a fortnight at Ardleigh Court."

"Oho!" thought Hubert, noting a slight frown which came over his father's face at the mention of his brother. "Oho!—so Roland's in the veteran's black books, too! Wonder what about."

"—This invitation you will decline," went on the hard, condemnatory voice. "Amusement and work in your case don't agree—and work you must. Every morning from breakfast time till luncheon during the next six weeks I shall expect you to be at your books, unless I see special reason to make an exception. You have done literally no work at all since your return home this vacation, and it is high time you began. And for the last time these"—tapping the bills lying upon his desk—"shall be paid. Are there any more of them outstanding, by the way?"

Now why had not Hubert the courage to make a clean breast of it. Here was an opportunity such as would not occur again. Ah! that slightly receding chin.

"Only two or three, for small amounts," he faltered.

"Very good. Make a list of them here," handing him a piece of paper.

"—And that is all? Yes? Then I need not detain you here any further—except again to impress upon you the necessity of attending to what I have been saying."

Hubert went out of his father's presence with hot, seething rage at his heart. He to be confined to the house every morning like a schoolboy, with a set task to do. "Gated," in fact—and that by his own father, and in his home. It was humiliating in the extreme. And there was no way in which the devil within him could find vent.

"Well, dear?" said his mother enquiringly, as he burst into the morning-room, where she had been anxiously awaiting the result of the interview. "And now I hope things are all right."

"All right?" echoed Hubert, his countenance ablaze with wrath and disgust. "All right? No, they're not, they're as wrong as they can be. Here am I set down to work every morning like a wretched schoolboy. I swear, it's damnable the way in which he treats me."

"Oh, Hubert—hush!" cried his mother and sister in one breath, both horror-stricken.

"Hush? Oh yes! Aren't we horrified?" he said jeeringly. "Women are so very easily shocked, I know. Faugh!" and he flung himself from the room.

But it was not on his younger son's account that General Dorrien had come down that morning "in a state of thundercloud," as that graceless delinquent had facetiously put it; and to let the reader into the real cause, it will be necessary for him or her to assist in the discussion which took place previous to the unlucky Hubert being summoned to the library.

"I don't really know what to think, much less what to say or do," said the General. "You saw for yourself, Eleanor; you saw them together. Now, what do you make of it?"

"Well, I do think it's too bad of Roland, and shows a

great want of proper feeling on his part. After all these years he has been away he does not give us much of his society. He seems to be quite taken up with those—people," answered Mrs. Dorrien, though, to do her justice, she answered with some reserve. Her heart was cold towards her eldest son, and not one spark of love had she for him; all was lavished on the younger. Yet, she told herself, she hoped she had a conscience.

"You are right," said the General decisively. "It shows a complete want of proper feeling. To be hanging about the public roads like that with the girl! Why, I believe he was about to——pah! It is disgraceful—disgusting and disgraceful, absolutely. Who are these Ingelows, by the way, Eleanor?"

"Oh, I'm sure I don't know," she answered loftily, as if the bare suspicion of her knowing anything about them was an imputation to be resented. "I believe they are well-connected and all that. But that anything serious should be the outcome of this would be most deplorable, I should think."

"It would, indeed. Highly deplorable, and in fact I won't entertain the idea of anything of the kind. Moreover, if what I hear is true, Roland spends a very great deal of his time in the society of this girl."

By which remark it will appear that the town of Wandsborough was in no way behind its provincial contemporaries in its passion for gossip.

"He may be only amusing himself. There may be nothing serious in it, after all," hazarded Mrs. Dorrien, her conscience prompting her to try and urge a plea for the absent one. But she could not have struck upon a more unlucky chord.

"Amusing himself! Well, I am surprised at you, Eleanor," cried the General, firing up. "Amusing himself? And do you remember what came of it on the last occasion of his similarly 'amusing himself'? Disgrace—pure and simple. Is that a prospect to contemplate with ordinary coolness, I ask you?"

"It strikes me forcibly that this young woman is well able to take care of herself," was the acid reply. "And I don't see what we—what you can do in the matter.

Roland is different now and, I fear, terribly difficult to deal with."

"As to what I can do—well, never mind," answered the General very grimly. "But it seems to me that Roland has not left off his old ways—or, at any rate, is fast returning to them. Why, we shall have another action for breach of promise threatened before we know where we are; these professional people are keen upon the main chance, and that Jesuitical brood above any," he continued, with a sneer. "And what I now say is that Roland had better be careful—for I will not be disgraced through him a second time with impunity. He has his own means, of course, but if he intends to take up his ultimate position in the county, let him show himself worthy of it."

Very decisive and stern and uncompromising was the General's tone and attitude as he concluded this last remark, and his wife, listening, was conscious of a warring tumult of feelings. Yet she dared not sacrifice right and justice to the cause of the one ruling passion of her life—her love for her younger son. So again she spoke in extenuation.

"It is a pity. But he will be going to Ardleigh Court next week—and there's no telling what change in his fancy his stay there may effect."

This time she touched the right spring. For she knew that her husband ardently desired a match between his eldest son and Clara Neville—a match that would bring about the union of the two fine old estates into one magnificent property. Hence he had "sounded" Roland on the subject, as we saw earlier in this narrative.

"There may be something in that," was the mollified reply. "Clara can be exceedingly engaging when she likes, and I know Neville would be delighted. He seemed to take a great fancy to Roland."

"I think he did."

"And if only Roland would throw himself into his future interest here. He ought to live here and help to look after things, but he seems to prefer an idle life, and the society of those Rectory people to that of his own family," said the General, relapsing again into ire over the thought.

"It is most unnatural of him, I must say, to dislike his home as he does," assented Mrs. Dorrien. Yet they forgot, did that worthy couple, how it would have been difficult indeed for anyone to feel any love for a home thus constituted.

"Well, it is useless discussing the matter further at present," was the decisive rejoinder. "But mark my words. Never—never, I say—while I can prevent it, shall Roland bring into this house a daughter of that despicable popish renegade. So he can act as he thinks fit. My mind is made up."

CHAPTER XIV.

"THE BAN OF CRAUNSTON."

"WELL, Miss Ingelow. All alone and wrapped in meditation! Hope I haven't disturbed the solution of some knotty problem."

"Oh, no, Mr. Dorrien," answered Margaret gaily, turning away from the window. "I haven't been long back from evensong, and the only problem I was trying to solve was, what can have become of father. He ought to have been back by now. And it has set in wet, and he didn't take an umbrella."

"He will be sure to borrow one, I should think. But are your sisters out in the rain, too?"

"I'm afraid I can't answer for that, they're too far away," said Margaret, with a laugh. "They went up to London yesterday, to stay with an aunt of ours."

"Went up to London? I had no idea of that," echoed Roland, with a momentary flash of surprise, strongly dashed with disappointment, crossing his face. "And do they make a long stay?"

"About a fortnight or three weeks. Ah—there is father!"

"Upon my word, Dorrien," began the rector, as Roy unceremoniously pushed past him while entering, "I must again impress upon you the slur you cast upon my hospitable gates by leaving this chap outside the same. Now, Roy, old man, make yourself at home."

"No fear of his not doing that," laughed Roy's master, as the dog deliberately curled himself up on the softest rug in the room. "But he was rather wet, so I thought he'd better wait outside."

"Father, go at once and change your cassock," interrupted Margaret. "It's wet through."

"Not a bit of it," replied the rector, stooping to inspect

his flowing skirt. "Brown lent me the very father of all ginghams. He buttonholed me in his dim, mysterious way, and said he hoped I wouldn't be above, &c., &c. I told him I should be more than glad to be beneath it, and accordingly came along the street under full sail and a complete shelter. Brown is the prince of opportune and considerate vergers. And now, Dorrien, don't hurry off. Stay and have a chop with us, and cheer an old man in his loneliness. My two youngest girls are away disporting themselves in the gay metropolis, so I can promise you a little less noise than usual. You've got your bicycle, I see, so you're independent."

Roland accepted with pleasure. He and the rector were great friends, and he was quite upon the "dropping in" footing by this time.

"Right. Margaret, take care of him for half an hour or so, during which period inexorable duty will keep your humble servant in his study chair." And the rector left the room, humming a bar or two of the old plainsong hymn, whose melody lingered in his mind fresh from the dimly lighted choir at the close of the evening office.

If disappointment as to the absent was weighing upon Roland's mind, he was unconsciously exemplifying the axiom as to a compensating element in all things. It was a few days after The Skegs exploration episode, and he had been making up his mind to take an opportunity of getting the rector to tell him the whole story of the legendary Ban, not that he believed in it himself, or was inclined to, but it would be interesting to hear the so-called facts. Here was just such an opportunity, as they would be alone together after dinner.

"You'll have a wet ride back, Mr. Dorrien, I'm afraid," said Margaret, as they sat down to table. "It's coming down harder than ever."

"Oh, that's nothing to some of my old privations," he laughed, "except that the very snugness now will make it all the rougher to turn out."

And snug it was. The drawn curtains only deadened the constant patter of the rain upon the windows, and the suggestion of the sort of evening outside thrown out by the sound, enhanced the sense of comfort and restfulness with-

in. Under these circumstances, three people, sufficiently well known to each other to be able to converse without restraint, are in a position to pass a thoroughly pleasant evening. Yet to one, at any rate, of these three there was a sense of something wanting—a vacant place, perhaps, as of somebody absent, whose absence was really missed. Roy, the irrepressible, with his wonted off-handedness, was begging impartially from everybody in turn.

"Bother that post!" exclaimed the rector, as a sharp double knock cut across the conversation. "A man can't dine in peace without this age of progress chucking its reprehensible invention into the flavour of his sirloin. Here we are—a whole stack of hopes and fears—" he went on, contemplating, with a whimsical expression, the sheaf of letters at that moment brought in. "First, diocesan—that'll keep. Item—invitation to preach—ditto, ditto. That's yours, Margaret—and—this is mine—from Olive. No, it's for me, all for me," he cried gleefully. "Not for you at all, Margaret, this time. Let's see what she says. Excuse me, Dorrien—sink ceremony. By the way, I promised you a quiet dinner in the absence of those two chatterboxes, and one of them sends us two sheets of clatter by post—ha-ha!"

It was very pleasant to watch the affectionate delight with which the old man read through his favourite child's letter.

"Why, they're only going to stay ten days after all," he cried in astonishment. "The child isn't generally so eager to get back to her old dad, after the joys and glories of the metropolis. Here's a message for you, Dorrien: 'Tell Mr. Dorrien, I saw a love of a dog the other day, that almost outshines Roy. Almost—not quite—mind you tell him *almost* or he'll never speak to me again.'"

Roland, who had been inwardly startled at the juxtaposition of ideas, quickly recovered himself, and made some pleasant remark. Two things occurred to him. It might be that there was some reason underlying Olive's anxiety to return speedily, and the message, innocent as it read, was to remind him that she did not forget him.

"Dad, Eustace is coming home next week," remarked Margaret, looking up from a letter she had been reading.

"Is he? The rascal! it's about time he did. Dorrien, you will have the dubious pleasure of making the acquaintance of my hopeful at the date just named. He has been away yachting with a friend, and by this time doubtless considers himself fully competent to take command of the Channel Fleet."

Thus conversation flowed on, and at last Margaret rose. No, she would not be lonely, she said, in response to an intimation to that effect. She had more than enough to do to occupy all her time.

"Draw round the fire, Dorrien—fancy requiring one at this time of year," said the rector, as the door closed upon his daughter. "Now to try and unearth some cigars," diving into a chiffonier in the corner. "Ah! here we are. Light up. Oh, and we'll put the decanters at the corner here, where we can reach them."

Roland blew out a long puff of smoke, and lay back in easy content.

"I wish you'd tell me something, Dr. Ingelow," he said.

"And that?"

"Why, I want to know the true version of that ridiculous story attached to our family. You know—the ghost on The Skegs. You are sure to have it at your fingers' ends."

"Does not your father know it?"

"I believe he does, but he promptly shelves the topic if you moot it. And, you know, he isn't the sort of man to get anything out of that he's bent on keeping dark."

"H'm! Well, the original version of the tradition is to be found in Surinn's 'Legends and Myths of Baronial Europe,' a very scarce and bulky book, which came out between forty and fifty years ago, and the incident occurred, if I remember rightly, in the middle of the last century. The narrative is entitled 'The Ban of Craunston.' It was a wild and lawless period in out-of-the-way parts, and this corner of the world came in no wise behind the spirit of the age, for the coast was the happy hunting ground of wreckers and smugglers, and the roads of highwaymen and other freebooters. At that time, one Richard Dorrien was Squire of Cranston. He was a bachelor, and his younger brother lived at the Hall with him. The

latter, Hubert by name, was an open-hearted, bright-spirited youngster, immensely popular with both sexes; whereas Richard, the Squire, seems to have been a gloomy, violent-tempered man, disliked and feared on all sides. Well, the brothers got on rather well together—possibly on account of the total dissimilarity of their characters—until the apple of discord was thrown into their midst in the shape of a young lady who came to take up her abode in Wandsborough, then a straggling little place, consisting of a score of houses. She was a foreigner—though of what nationality the chronicle omits to state—of extraordinary beauty, and lived alone with a *duenna* of regulation age and hideosity. It is said that this young woman was a Jacobite emissary, and it was in that capacity that she and Richard Dorrien became acquainted, for he was an ardent Jacobite, and over head and ears involved in the plots of the day. But be this as it may, it was a case of love at first sight. The churlish and misanthropical Squire became violently enslaved; unfortunately, however, the lady declined his addresses. More unfortunately still, she did not decline those of his brother—quite the reverse. Well, now, this position of affairs could but have one ending, in a state of society wherein men ran each other through on far less provocation than would induce you in these days to knock a fellow down. But there was no open quarrel. On the contrary, the Squire was so studiously cordial to his brother that the latter was thrown quite off his guard. Not so one or two of his intimates, who went so far as to warn him—and nearly got run through for their pains. Matters went on in this way till the day before Hubert was to wed the fair unknown. On the afternoon of that day the two brothers put off in their sailing cutter to tack about the bay. They were alone together, and seemed on the best of terms. The afternoon closed in squally and rough, and the boat and its occupants were lost to view in the mist. Darkness came on, and still the Dorriens did not return. The seafaring people at Minchkil began to get anxious, and talked of going in search, but there was a high sea running and every sign of a rising gale; moreover, they knew that the missing men were nearly as amphibious as they themselves. Then

suddenly there sounded through the night the wild unearthly howling of a dog. Awed to the heart, it was some time before the superstitious seafarers could make up their minds to investigate further. The sound came from the cliff above them to westward, and thither at last they all proceeded. There, at the very extremity of the headland which looks down on The Skegs, stood a huge boarhound, which they recognised as the Squire's favourite dog, Satan, a savage brute, of whom the whole neighbourhood stood in terror. The animal stood there on the brink of the cliff—his neck stretched out over the churning waves below—throwing out his long-drawn, deep-voiced bay into the misty darkness. Then the men knew that something had happened. And now mark this. At the very moment this discovery was made, Richard Dorrien appeared suddenly before the young foreign lady, dripping and soaked from head to foot, and told her, without the slightest warning, that her lover was drowned. She seemed turned to stone. She gazed at him for a moment with a wild stare, gasped out one word—'Murdered!'—and, still fixing him with that glassy stare, fell prone to the floor in a swoon. He never saw her again.

"A terrible gale raged all that night, and in the morning fragments of the missing boat were washed ashore. The craft had been splintered almost to matchwood. It was not till many days afterwards that Hubert Dorrien's corpse came to light. At first the survivor would hardly mention the subject, much less give any account of it. Eventually, however, it leaked out that the boat had been driven upon The Skegs by the gale, and its occupants, thrown into the water, were forced to swim for their lives. And now, although nothing can be more reasonable and probable than this solution of the matter, it was not long before dark rumours began to get about. Of course, there could be no vestige of proof either way; for the tragedy out there in the black and storm-lashed bay was witnessed by no mortal eye. Months went by. The survivor became more and more morose, shunned everybody, and took to hard drinking. The cause of all the turmoil left the neighbourhood the week following on the tragedy. One morning, Cranston was in a state of alarm. The Squire

was missing. Enquiry at length elicited that he had put out to sea the previous night accompanied only by his huge hound. Richard Dorrien was never seen again, neither was his dog. The night was wild and tempestuous, and it was at first thought that his boat had been swamped. But days and weeks went by, and no trace of wreckage came to light—and finally all hope was abandoned.

"Then suddenly an awful state of scare arose among the seafaring population. Ghostly bayings began to be heard at night on the cliff in the neighbourhood of The Skegs. They were heard by fishermen in their boats at sea and by belated wanderers out on the down. Some had even made out the shape of a large dog resting on the summit of the loftier of The Skegs. Forthwith, the theory took root that Richard Dorrien had, beyond doubt, murdered his brother, and in expiation was doomed to haunt the scene of the tragedy and take the shape of his huge and savage boarhound. Those who have any idea to what depths of superstition the country population was in those days plunged, can easily imagine the frantic terror which such an apparition would have for the pliers of a dangerous calling. Why, to this day you can't induce one of the fisher folk to venture too near The Skegs—let alone land there."

"But wasn't there a death warning conveyed by the apparition?" asked Roland.

"Ah! now we come to the strangest part of the whole story. There got about soon afterwards a curious prophecy; no one has ever been able to tell with whom it originated. Perhaps you know it?"

"I know that this shape is said to appear whenever one of us had lived long enough, and that it is predicted that we are none of us to die in our beds, but yet bloodlessly, which is a consolation to any of us who may be engaged in a scrimmage. But the prediction has been falsified—on the last occasion at any rate. My brother Vernon tumbled into a crevasse, you know, and as the poor chap must have been dashed to pieces the tradition fails."

"Well, I don't want to encourage you in any uncomfortable apprehensions, Dorrien; but what you say does not necessarily follow."

"Now you mention it, no more it does. And it is undoubtedly a queer thing that we should all have come to grief by water. I suppose, as a glacier is frozen water, the last instance holds good. Then there was my uncle, who died suddenly on deck, and was buried at sea. My grandfather, again, was drowned while skating, and they say the tradition carries itself further back still. However, as we seem all born to be drowned we can none of us be hanged, so there's a bright side to even that situation. By the way, was the 'Ban' to the fore on the last occasion?"

"I only know that so it was reported. A shepherd came running in from Durnley Downs one night, with a white face and chattering teeth, and vowed he had seen and heard the dog on The Skegs. Two days afterwards the news of the disaster arrived. But I wouldn't trouble my head about the affair, if I were you."

"Not I. Life is a precious deal too prosaic and tangible a concern for a man to bother himself about local superstitions."

"Well, I should have imagined that would be your idea, or I would not have opened my mind upon a gruesome tradition which is supposed to concern you and yours," was the rector's reply, in a more careless tone than he had adopted yet.

One side of the prophecy, however, he withheld from his questioner. This was, that though every male Dorrien should under it meet with a bloodless death—presumably by water—the power of the "Ban" would at last be broken—broken by some terrible and tragic eventuality, obscurely and ambiguously hinted at.

"By Jove, Doctor, but you do know how to tell a ghost story," laughed Roland, when the other had done. "Why, you spun that yarn as if you believed every word of it yourself."

"Well? That's the right way to tell any story, isn't it?" said the rector carelessly. And then, as it was getting late, Roland got up to leave.

Later, as he was sending his bicycle through the pouring rain at a pace which should make short work of the three miles of smooth but hilly road which lay between the

Rectory and Cranston—Roy, a draggled mass of woolly mud, galloping behind—the incidents of the strange and gruesome tale seemed to take hold of his mind in the darkness.

"Looks as if the prediction was going to be fulfilled again in my own case at the rate this infernal rain's coming down," he said to himself, half jocosely, half grimly.

CHAPTER XV.

AT ARDLEIGH.

In due course, Roland availed himself of the invitation to which we heard his father make reference, and transferred himself and his luggage to the ancestral home of the Nevilles.

There the cordiality of his reception surprised and pleased him. The Colonel was, as we have seen, very well disposed towards the son of his old friend and comrade-in-arms, and, moreover, was delighted to have a companion for the smoking-room and the morning lounge; one, too, who was such a capital listener; for to Roland the old man's stories were all new, and being good in themselves when not heard too often, the normal quiet of Ardleigh was apt to be disturbed by much uproarious mirth when the two got together. As for Clara, she seemed to have quite forgotten any little unpleasantness which had taken place when they last met, and had put on her most gracious and agreeable manner for their guest's benefit; and as she knew how to show to advantage when she chose, and was exceedingly clever and well informed, Roland found himself beginning to feel rather ashamed of his former bad opinion of her. Mrs. Neville, who was somewhat of an invalid and of an argumentative—not to say contradictious—turn, forbore to snub him as she was wont to snub everything male under the age of fifty. "Young men want continually putting down, even when they are right"—was her creed, and, truth to say, she acted up to it most religiously. But in Roland's favour exception was made; whether it was that he was known to possess "a queer temper"—his father's own son, in fact—or that there was some ulterior reason for making his stay a particularly attractive one, his conversational remarks were allowed to pass unchallenged by his hostess to an extent which

caused the girls to exchange frequent glances of surprise. Even Roy's presence was not only tolerated, but welcomed, and the woolly rascal, before he had been twenty-four hours at Ardleigh, ran in and out as he pleased, according to his usual way of making himself perfectly at home wherever he went.

"By the way, how does our reformed black sheep, Steve Devine, get on in the capacity of a thief set to catch a thief?" asked Roland, as he and his host were smoking their after-breakfast cigars on the terrace one morning.

"All right as yet," replied the latter, who being in want of an underkeeper, had, on Roland's representations partly, appointed the ex-poacher to that office a few days after his release from gaol—"in order to give him a fair chance of starting afresh," as the kind-hearted old soldier put it. The latter's friends, indeed, shook their heads over the arrangement, and prophesied that it would lead to no good—but the Colonel was not to be upset in his benevolent scheme once he had made up his mind. So Devine found himself installed in a snug berth with good wages, and if, being in such a fair way to doing well, he did not do it, why, he would have himself only to thank for it as an ungrateful rascal.

Now the ex-poacher knew perfectly well that he owed this piece of luck largely to Roland's good word for him, for his employer had told him as much; and this being so, of course, by all the rules of that maudlin and slobbery optimism which usually characterises human nature in fiction—especially cad human nature—he should have become eternally grateful, and his former hostility straightway have been metamorphosed to lifelong devotion. But was this the case?

Not even a little bit. No idea of gratitude ever entered his head. It was only for his own purposes that the young Squire of Cranston had helped him, argued this ruffian, with the low suspicious cunning of his class, but he, Devine, would keep a weather eye open, never fear.

He was right in a way. Roland had acted to serve his

own purposes, but in a directly opposite sense to that suspected by Gipsy Steve.

"By the way, Roland," went on the Colonel, "that daughter of his is a monstrously pretty girl, eh? By Jove, sir, but I don't believe you'd have bothered your head about them if she'd had a snub nose and a squint, eh?"

"No, I shouldn't. Beauty in distress appeals to the susceptibilities of man, whereas hideosity in similar case does not—unchivalric, even brutal as the confession may sound. But as the girl is only on a visit to her father—doesn't live with him—my character may be regarded as clear."

"Ha-ha! You dog!" laughed the jolly Colonel. "That reminds me of——"

But what it reminded him of did not transpire, for at that moment they were joined by Clara, basket in hand. She was going to gather some roses, she said. Roland, however much he might or might not have preferred his cigar and his host's more or less sporting stories, could do nothing less than offer to help her. Which offer was graciously accepted.

"Ha-ha! Roland, she'll make you do all the finger-picking part of the business," jocosely cried the Colonel after them.

"By the bye, what was the sequel to that unlucky smash in the conservatory?" said Clara, as they turned into the garden path. "The orchid, I mean. Did you get frightfully scolded?"

This in reference to a casualty which had befallen during the speaker's stay at Cranston, when again the sweep of Roy's blundering tail had wrought mischief, breaking a fairly valuable orchid.

"No—I was let down rather easily. The veteran said it wasn't a very rare one, and only remarked in his glum way that he supposed dogs would be happier outside conservatories than in them."

"Ah! I'm glad of that; I was afraid the General would have been dreadfully vexed. Can you reach that, Mr. Dorrien? There, if I hold down the bough—so—thanks. Now that other one."

Her tall, elegant figure showed to advantage in the light

morning dress, as in easy attitude she reached up to hold the refractory bough—Clara Neville was not one to indulge in unbecoming exertions. Her voice was low and well modulated, and fell pleasantly upon the ear—around them blossoming rose-bushes and the fragrant scents of the garden—and in the background bits of the red-brick Elizabethan house peeped at them through the trees. In no wise was he insensible to the influences of the picture and its central figure, the graceful, handsome girl talking to him in easy, familiar manner and with her most attractive smile; and then for the first time his father's words, spoken on the evening of the day he first saw Clara Neville, darted across his mind, "She will have Ardleigh Court"—and now it also dawned upon him that the words had been spoken with design.

Yet how many men would willingly have changed places with him! And, even as things stood, his father's cherished scheme, for now he felt instinctively that such it was, would not have come aversely to him—if—ah! that little "if!"

"Oh, Mr. Dorrien—there, look, you've splashed me all over by letting go of that branch too soon," cried Clara, with a little shiver. "And it has all gone up my sleeve, and it's rather cold. But never mind," she added with a laugh, "you've come off second best. How you've scratched yourself!"

"Oh, it's nothing," he replied hastily, apologising for his remissness and feeling guilty. The branch which he had let go of was thorny, and had torn his hand at the same time as it had sprinkled his fair companion with the rain-drops which hung upon its leaves.

"I think we've picked enough now, so we can go in. By the way, papa warned you that you would find the thorns your portion, didn't he?" she said, with a smile.

In his present train of thought the phrase struck him as prophetic. He feared that many thorns would encompass the path by which he was to reach his desired goal, yet none the less was he determined to reach it.

"Mr. Dorrien," said Maud Neville, at luncheon, "the Fates have ordained that you shall go to a tennis party with us at the Pagnells' this afternoon, Now, don't swear—secretly, I mean."

"Maud!" ejaculated her mother.

"If you only knew how urgently Isabel entreats us to bring you, Mr. Dorrien," said Clara, "you would be far too much flattered—or ought to be."

"Ho-ho! Roland," laughed the Colonel. "No slipping away to smoke a quiet weed this time, no matter how heavy in hand the entertainment."

"I don't think it'll be heavy," said Clara. "Isabel generally manages to get together a lively enough set. Too lively sometimes, for it is a favourite trick of hers to ask all the people to meet each other who are most 'at dead cuts.'"

"Very bad taste of her," put in Mrs. Neville. "But I don't know what girls are coming to now-a-days."

Bankside, the Pagnells' house, was a pretty, old-fashioned box, perched on the side of a hill and commanding a lovely view of the Wandsborough valley. A snug, leafy retreat, all shrubbery and flowers and smooth lawns—it was just the place for open-air festivities. We have already made the acquaintance of its lord on the magisterial bench, which is as well, as we shall not see him here. He has a horror of social gatherings, and leaves all duties of entertaining to his eldest daughter, Isabel—a tall, handsome girl of five-and-twenty.

"So here you are at last, Clara," was the latter's greeting, as she came forward to receive the Ardleigh party. "You disappointing girl! I particularly asked you to come rather early, and so you wait until the last moment. How are you, Mr. Dorrien? And now—come and have some tea."

"You seem to have got together a good many new people, Isabel," said Clara, as they made their way to the tennis ground. "First of all, who is that tall young fellow in white flannels over there, laughing as if he would never stop?"

"Where? Oh, that. That's Eustace Ingelow. Nice looking boy, isn't he? Odd you've never met him—and hasn't he grown handsome? I'll introduce him," and in obedience to her beckoning signal, the subject under dis-

cussion hastened up and was introduced in due course. Even Clara, who was not fond of the family, readily admitted that in appearance the rector's son bore out her friend's eulogium. Tall and well-made, his sunbrowned, handsome face wearing the brightest and merriest of expressions, and his manner, though perfectly free and unaffected, devoid of all approach to bumptiousness, the young fellow had been winning golden opinions from everybody.

"Ah, Mr. Dorrien, I've heard of you," he said, turning his dark eyes upon this new acquaintance. "Awfully glad to meet you," and a hearty hand-grip cemented their friendship on the spot.

"Now, Mr. Dorrien, no shirking, if you please," cried Isabel laughingly. "It has been my sole object in life this afternoon to let no two men hang together; so come along and be introduced all round, and do your duty. Can't help it, Clara, must be done," she added, with the faintest possible significance in her tone as she turned away.

Roland felt rather savage. He wanted to elicit some information from Eustace Ingelow, by dint of a few carelessly worded questions, but no opportunity was vouchsafed him. However, he descried Margaret on the other side of the lawn, and upon her presently he bore down.

"—Expecting them home? But they are home, Mr. Dorrien," said Margaret in surprise, answering a question as to her sisters' return. "They came back yesterday. Olive is rather unwell to-day, and is staying at home. Have you met my brother?" as the latter passed them, talking to Nellie Dorrien, to whom he had obtained an introduction.

"I say, Margaret," said the graceless youth, stopping a moment, "old mother Frewen seems as sulphurous as ever. Look at her over there, 'testifying.' You ought to have converted her by this time," with a quizzical glance in the direction of an old lady, who was an "aggrieved parishioner" of a perfervid type.

"Don't talk nonsense, Eusty. Someone will hear you."

"Ha! ha! Let's go and hear her, at a respectful distance, eh, Miss Dorrien?—it'll be fun," suggested crafty Eustace, with the object of beguiling Nellie for a walk

round the shrubberies—an object in which he succeeded; and judging from the frequency with which the fair, sweet face was convulsed with laughter, it seemed that they managed to make the time pass right merrily.

"Nellie, your mother has been looking for you everywhere. It's time to go home," said a cold voice at her elbow, and turning with a little start of dismay, she found herself face to face with her father, who was looking very stern and gloomy.

"Yes, papa? I'm so sorry," and, with a hurried farewell to her companion, she proceeded to obey the implied injunction, her experience warning her that there were squalls ahead; while her late escort, disconsolately anathematising the lord of Cranston as a cantankerous old ruffian, betook himself once more to the assemblage of his fellows.

"Who was that boy with whom you spent the afternoon, Nellie?" asked General Dorrien, in the carriage on the way home.

"I didn't know I had spent the afternoon with anyone, papa," she replied, as gently as she could. "But if you mean who was I talking to when you came up, it was Mr. Eustace Ingelow."

"Was it? A most impertinent boy, I call him," went on her father, with a very dark look. "Because he meets anyone in society, that seems a sufficient reason for monopolising them for the rest of the afternoon. An impudent, pushing, and most forward young cub, to come thrusting himself upon us, and you to encourage him! Who is he, I should like to know? We've never seen him before, and, if I can help it, we shall never see him again."

Poor Nellie made no reply, beyond a weary little sigh. What had she done? Why, the duration of their harmless little walk had barely exceeded half an hour. And in her heart of hearts she owned to herself that the said half-hour had flown very quickly indeed.

"I say, dad," cried Eustace Ingelow that evening at the dinner-table. "I like that man Dorrien. Rather reserved and—er—quiet at first—the sort of man who wants knowing, eh?"

"H'm, so that's your opinion, is it?" said the rector,

somewhat attentively. "Now I shouldn't have thought he'd have been at all the sort of fellow you'd have taken to at first sight, Eustace."

"Yes, he is," replied the Oxonian decidedly. "He's a man with a lot in him, I should think. Now that brother of his—the one that's at Queen's—he's a—a—well, a scrubby sort, but I like this one. Roland, don't they call him, eh?"

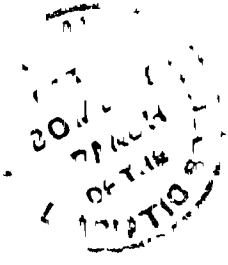
"It strikes me, from all accounts, that you like his sister a great deal more," cried Sophie. "Why, Eusty, you disgraceful boy, you know you flirted outrageously with her all the afternoon."

"Bosh! What next?" he protested, growing very red. "You girls think a fellow can't speak to another girl without—er—without——. Besides you weren't there, and you should never take hearsay evidence, Sophonisba, my jewel."

"Never mind her, Eusty," struck in Olive, who had recovered her spirits simultaneously with the return of her brother full of the doings at the Pagnells'. "Never mind her—Nellie Dorrien's a dear, sweet girl, and you might do worse."

"What do you think of that, dad? Just listen to them, how they badger a fellow."

"No—no—I won't come to your rescue," cried the rector, with a hearty laugh. "You must fight them single-handed. What's the good of going to Oxford if it doesn't teach you to take care of yourself, and against a pack of women, too?"



CHAPTER XVI.

THE DIE IS CAST.

"RATHER perfect? I should just think it was," cries Olive, gazing around. "Confess now, you hardened cynic, that in all your wanderings you never saw anything so perfectly lovely as this."

"I'll own up readily enough. I never did," is her companion's reply.

"But—you are not looking at it," turning to find that his glance has been fixed upon herself while he spoke, and colouring softly at the discovery.

"Oh, yes, I am. I repeat, I never saw anything so perfectly lovely as this. What a distrustful little article it is, to require so much reassuring!" and his hand, which has been toying with her small fingers, closes upon them with a fond pressure, as looking straight into her eyes he repeats her words.

From their heathery resting-place on the summit of Minchkil Beacon, they gaze idly upon the glories of the panorama unfolded beneath and around. The great slopes of the downs are gorgeous with flaming gorse and crimson heather. A rich summer haze lying over the landscape adds distance to meadow and woodland, alternating in many an undulating roll—the latter just perceptibly assuming its first autumnal tints; and cosy homesteads, nestling among their sheltering trees, look doubly snug and prosperous as contrasted with their counterparts of the upland farms, whose corn-ricks and a few stunted firs form the only shade. Villages, too, and tiny hamlets, dropped about, as it were. Frondesham, beyond the lofty steeple of Wandsborough Church, which latter rises above that long, grassy ridge as if refusing to be hidden, and on the further side of the valley, the hamlets of Cranston and Ardleigh; the mile and a half of straight, dusty road con-

necting them looking like a mere streak of whitewash—and, higher up, Cranston Hall, half hidden in its noble park.

And turning to seaward—space. The broad expanse of limitless sea, far down, four hundred feet beneath—blue and placid as the firmament overhead. Two or three brown specks—fishing boats lying with listless sails—are the only signs of life upon its motionless waters. Not even a gull is on the wing, and the wavelets have forgotten to break on the shingly beach. The sun drives on his flaming chariot, slowly, slowly towards the west, and the great cliffs of the bold coast-line reflect his lengthening rays in many a ruddy gleam—Hadden's Slide, and beyond, Smugglers' Ladder, a black fissure, rending the whole face of the cliff from brow to base. Then on the other side The Skegs, tranquil, and forgetting to look grim and dour, as they start sleepily from their setting of still, blue water—and above them the lofty headland where looms the grey tower of Durnley Castle—a mouldering ruin. Farther and farther recedes the outline of the rugged coast, in rocky bay and bold promontory, with here a strip of shingle, there a line of seaweed-covered reefs, till it loses itself in a faint confusion of distant blue.

It is golden August now—rich, glowing, sensuous, lovely August—when summer, as if suddenly awaking to a sense of opportunities neglected and to the consciousness that her days are nearly numbered, would fain crowd all her accumulated glories into the few yet remaining to her, pouring out her choicest gifts with a lavish hand, as though anxious that we should think kindly of her when she is no more, by virtue of her sudden repentance and amendment at the eleventh hour.

Should you, while taking your walks abroad some fine summer's day, chance, unexpectedly, and in a secluded spot, to light upon about six foot of Young England taking it remarkably easy in a reclining attitude among the soft and fragrant heather; and should you, moreover, descry seated in very close juxtaposition to Young England aforesaid, a sweetly pretty girl, occupied mainly in dividing the shelter of her sunshade with the male and recumbent head, while listening attentively to words of wisdom—or

the reverse—emanating from the male lips; you would, we trow, if of a kindly disposition, retire as you came, leaving the idyllic pair undisturbed. If of a cynical turn you would, we trow, chuckle, as you went, over one more instance of human fatuity. But whatever your nature you would decide that affairs between this particular couple had gone tolerably far.

Well—and so they had.

There are, we take it, about three ways which lead to what the provincial reporter delights to term "the hymeneal altar." The first is the ordinary "proposal," wherein John is conventionally supposed to sue humbly for the privilege of maintaining Mary for the term of her natural life, eke Mary's prospective lineal descendants in any number—not exceeding seventeen—peradventure with a mother-in-law thrown in, and to count life as not worth living, in the event of these multifold advantages—we will not call them liabilities—being denied him. The second may be termed the extraordinary "proposal," wherein the overtures are precisely the other way about, barring, it may be, the maintenance condition and the mother-in-law; and this, by the bye, is not so uncommon as Mrs. Grundy affects to believe. The third differs *in toto* from the other two, in that it does not deal with "proposals" at all, but is the result of evolution—taking rise in a tacit and intangible understanding, and culminating in an arrangement neither more nor less definite than any *entente à deux* can be said ever to be. This way, on the face of it, is the most risky of the three, but it has its advantages.

Whatever its risks, however, just such an understanding exists between the pair whom we find alone here on the summit of Minchkil Beacon. Roy, curled up there among the heather and apparently asleep, will take good care that the intruding steps of any afternoon wayfarer shall not approach unsignalled—and meanwhile to all purposes these two have the world to themselves.

"Am I distrustful?" says Olive softly, in comment on her companion's last remark.

"No, you're not," is the vehement reply, "but I am. I thought you were never coming back, and was very nearly

going up to Town myself. Now look here. I can't let you go again!"

"But I must go again," she objected demurely, but with a flash of mirth in her dark eyes. "I shall have to go soon, too."

"You shan't." His hand closes on hers, as if the prohibition was to be put in force at that moment and by physical agency.

"Diddums teasums then!" says the girl in tones of mock soothing, passing her little hand over his forehead and hair caressingly. "You know, dear, I like sometimes to arouse the savage in your composition. It amuses me, because I can send him back into his shell in a minute. But it's all very well. You had a very good time of it while I was away. At Ardleigh, for instance!"

For all answer he laughs—quietly, almost inarticulately, as a man will laugh over some proposition manifestly, absurdly preposterous.

"That's all very well, but I hear the Nevilles are very delightful people, and——"

"Broomsticks."

"—And Clara and Maud, you know, were very sweet to you, and Isabel Pagnell——"

"—And Mother Frewen, and Miss Munch and Mrs. Bunch. Go on. Run through the whole list—of broomsticks."

"And then you used to have snug talks with Margaret over the fire on wet afternoons, and I don't believe poor little me was missed a bit. Margaret can be very entertaining when she likes."

"A broomstick!"

"Mr. Dorrien! That's rude."

"Excessively. But in evoking the latent barbarian, for whom you just now expressed—er—a flattering partiality—you have once more provided yourself with further amusement."

Her only answer is a merry laugh, and for a few minutes neither speak. The whirr of a reaping machine—for the early harvest has already begun—and the sound of reapers' voices is borne up from the valley, with now and then the barking of a farmhouse dog. The rallying note of a covey

of scattered partridges, the distant cawing of rooks, and the hum of bees gathering their stores from the cells of the blossoming heather, all blend into a luxurious harmony, well in keeping with the still witchery of the waning afternoon. They are outside the world, for the time being, these two—away in a cloudland of their own, bounded by the purple heather around and the sapphire sea below, the ordinary considerations of mere prosaic, everyday life as far removed as the distant sights and sounds in the valley beneath. Stay, though. One of them cannot altogether shut out these obtrusive considerations. Roland, cool and cynical beyond his years, cannot forget that the brightest picture has its reverse side, and that there will be a morrow to this cloudless day of radiance and of love.

He has striven to cherish a vague and desperate hope that something may occur tending to smooth matters—yet it is hardly likely. That unlucky stay at Ardleigh—how far back it looked now—seemed somehow to have committed him to the fulfilment of his father's wish; in the latter's eyes, that is, for he stood committed in nobody else's. Moreover, as General Dorrien's hints on the subject grew plainer, so did his animosity towards the Ingelows increase, and this to such a pitch that more than once a terrible rupture was imminent, as Roland found himself compelled to listen to his father's violent and unreasoning tirades. Still, he managed to conceal his feelings. But every hour confirmed him in the certainty that the day he decisively announced his intention of running counter to his father's cherished scheme, that day would see him disinherited.

And now a sweet, serious look has come over Olive's face, and it seems as if the bright, merry-hearted girl had been changed, all in a minute, into a tender, thoughtful, loving woman, who knew the world and its sorrows well.

"Darling!" she exclaims softly. "There is something I want to say to you, and I don't quite know how to say it; however, I must try. I have been thinking so much lately whether you are not making a great mistake—whether I have any right to let you risk your future, whether it would not have been much better for you had we never

met. Wait—don't interrupt—let me say all, it's difficult enough, Heaven knows. Why should you imperil your interests and perhaps be for ever separated from others you love—and all for me? Why should I bring sorrow upon you? Roland, darling, think well of what I say. Remember it is not too late now. The day may come when you will look back upon this sweet—this beautiful time"—a quiver in her voice—"with nothing but bitterness. What then?"

Has her love for him at its climax given her a sudden and magical insight into the future? Is the time coming when he will remember her prophetic words—but their fulfilment, it may be, in a different sense to that in which they are uttered?

"What then?" is the vehemenent reply. "Only this, that—that—(the strong, cool-headed man finds himself helplessly stuttering) "—that this understanding of ours—delicious as it is to have it all to ourselves—must become public property to-morrow. You must never be in a position to say such things to me again."

"Oh, my darling! I am only thinking of you and your happiness." Then, with a warm rush of feeling: "Can such a day as this ever come again in a lifetime? It is very foolish of me, but I have a presentiment that there is trouble before us, and that even now it would be better for you had we never met. I want you to do nothing in a hurry. Better to wait—to go on as we are—than to risk your prospects for me."

He finds no great difficulty in reassuring her as they sit there in their golden lotus-dream, with all the glories of earth and air spreading around them. The busy world lies far beneath; here, silence and the evensong of birds, and the flood of dazzling sheen on the purple sea, as the sun dips down nearer and nearer to his liquid bed. Just then, in silvery chimes, distant yet clear, the bells of Wandsborough steeple ring out the Angelus.

Then they descend the heather-clad slope, and make their way through the dewy, silent fields. And now a great orb of fire touches the farther edge of the glowing sea, tingeing it blood-red, and the horizon is all aflame. A passing gleam, as a ray from an enchanted world, strikes

broadly over hill and lea, then fades, leaving the earth in shadow, and the fragrant breaths of gathering night fall thickly around. There is a scent as of crushed roses in the air, and the grass is already wet with dew. The distant bark of a sheep-dog from an upland farm, the lowing of kine wending their way to the milking yard, the whistle of the reapers leaving their labour—only these sounds breaking musically now and again upon this stillness of rural peace.

So ends the day. But what of the morrow?

CHAPTER XVII.

CHECK!

"CAN I see Mr. Dorrien?—Yes, certainly. Show him in here," and the rector, making a hasty note on the margin of his paper, laid aside his pen as Roland was shown into the study.

A nervous man, full of the errand on which he had come, might have felt his besetting weakness to a painful extent at the prosaic hour of 10 a.m., here, in this judicial-looking apartment, wherein multitudinous papers disposed about seemed to speak of the more serious side of life, while the shelves of heavily-bound volumes lent a somewhat severe air to the room—and that notwithstanding the real cordiality of his reception; for it is one thing to be on sufficiently intimate terms with a man to justify your dropping in upon him informally for a friendly chat, and quite another to offer yourself as his future son-in-law. But Roland was not of the nervous order. Even had he been, it is probable that experiences of *tête-à-tête* interviews with a far more formidable personage than Dr. Ingelow would have eliminated from this one all its imaginary misgivings, if only by contrast. So after a commonplace remark or two he came straight to the point without difficulty.

Quietly, yet attentively, the rector listened to all his visitor had to say, and listening, felt no doubt as to the eligibility of the speaker. Possibly he was not wholly unprepared for the avowal, sooner or later. Anyhow, he showed little or no surprise. It was his wont to receive important matters calmly.

"And so I must give up my little Olive?" he said, with a pleasant smile. "However, I suppose the certainty of having to part with them some day or other is one of the disadvantages a man has to labour under if he owns pretty

and attractive daughters. But may I ask, Mr. Dorrien, whether you have informed your family—your father—of the step you propose to take?"

Roland stared. He was considerably taken aback by this question, and, in truth, not a little annoyed. And an unwonted formality about the other's tone tended somewhat to disconcert him.

"Well, no—I can't say I have. Naturally, I imagined that you yourself were the first person to be spoken to on the subject. To be candid with you, Dr. Ingelow, I have knocked about the world long enough to dispense with the paternal sanction to any undertaking of mine. Moreover, you may possibly be aware that my family and myself are never on very good terms—unfortunately, I admit—but still it is so."

The rector did not at once reply. He was leaning back in his chair, one hand thoughtfully stroking his beard, while the other toyed listlessly with one of the buttons of his cassock, and his brows were slightly contracted.

"It is unfortunate, Dorrien, because the fact of things being so, rather tends to complicate the situation," he replied at length, as the slightest possible movement of impatience, which Roland could not for the life of him suppress, did not escape his quick perceptions. "For it happens that I have certain old-fashioned ideas of my own on these matters. Wait—just hear what I've got to say"—laying his hand on the other's arm with a kindly, reassuring touch—"and bear with what you think an old man's unreasonable whims. Now go straight to Cranston and lay the whole matter before your father. Then come back here and tell me the result."

"Am I to understand, then, Dr. Ingelow, that you will only grant your consent subject to the contingency of my father granting his?" said Roland, in a tone whose bitterness it was impossible to conceal.

The rector felt puzzled by the directness of this query, but he did not show it.

"I haven't asked you to do a very hard or unreasonable thing, Dorrien," he said, with a quiet smile. "Now do oblige me in this. Can you not see that I am justified in requiring it? Then we can talk over matters further."

Roland felt thoroughly outflanked. He could not tell his father-in-law elect that his own amiable parent would more readily give his sanction to an alliance of his house with the Prince of Darkness than with that of himself—yet he knew perfectly well it was so. Here, indeed, was a most formidable obstruction in the way; one, moreover, on which he had never reckoned. He could only agree mechanically to the rector's proposal, but his heart sank within him as he took his leave. No, he had not bargained for this.

All seemed to augur badly for the successful outcome of his errand, for the General was out, and was not expected back till nearly dinner-time, he learned on reaching Cranston. But the General returned in such a state of ill-humour that it was obviously useless to broach the subject that night. On the morrow—well, it was just possible that some miracle might interpose on his behalf, but hardly probable. Never did it seem to him that he could remember a more thoroughly depressing evening than this one. His father scarcely spoke, and when he did address him it was in a tone of studied coldness; his mother would now and then make a captious remark, while Hubert sulkily plied his knife and fork, and made no attempt at conversation whatever. Heartily glad was he then to find himself at last in the smoking-room.

"Hallo! Roland—there you are," cried Hubert, banging the door behind him, and flinging himself into an arm-chair. "Now one can breathe freely, at any rate. The veteran looks sweet to-night, doesn't he?"

"Yes. What one might call re-entering the glacial period, eh?"

"Haw! haw! Rather. But 'pon my soul, you ought to thank your stars night and day that you're out of this infernal house."

"H'm! Why don't you go abroad, or somewhere, during the 'Long'? You've heaps of time."

"Don't I wish I may get it! *He* takes precious good care I don't—that's why," rejoined Hubert, wrathful over the memory of his wrongs; and then he relapsed into silence. The fact was, he began to feel embarrassed, for he was trying to summon up courage to ask his brother a

favour. He had been leading a life of terrible anxiety for the last few weeks. A bill was on the point of falling due, and he had not a notion how it was to be met. Result —another exposure. For what made it worse was the fact of his having denied further liability when his father had paid off his debts a couple of months back, and now it would come out that he had—well, stated what he knew to be contrary to fact. In his extremity, he thought of Roland, and now the moment struck him in a propitious light.

"Keeps you tight, I suppose?"

"Tight! I should just think he did," replied Hubert, with alacrity. Surely the conversation was working round towards a favourable opening.

"Hard luck that. Try one of these weeds."

"Thanks. And—er—I say, Roland, there's something I rather thought—er—you might perhaps do for me. The fact is, you see, I'm in a devil of a fix just now—don't know which way to turn. And if the veteran should find it out I'm clean done."

Roland eyed him rather curiously.

"Well, what is it? Cash—or petticoat? Those being the two main sources of man's difficulties."

"Well, it's a bill."

"Been flying kites, eh?"

"Yes," answered Hubert in desperation. Why the deuce was the other so infernally laconic and quiet over it—why couldn't he show a little feeling? he thought—and then his heart sank, for he made sure Roland would put him off with the usual excuse. But the next words reassured him.

"H'm! That's better. If it had been the other phase of the root of all evil, I don't see how I could have helped you to avoid reaping the traditional whirlwind. But what's the amount?"

Hubert named it—rather shamefacedly. It was a fair sum, just topping the three figures. More, a good deal, than Roland had expected, but he showed no surprise. He had made up his mind to help his brother in this, though Hubert's deportment towards himself had hitherto been ill-conditioned enough—and now he speculated idly as to

whether the other would feel any gratitude towards him or hate him all the more.

Hubert, meanwhile, felt his fears revive during the silence that ensued, and he thought enviously of all the advantages his brother possessed. Here he was, free from this wretched home, with a handsome independence of his own, over and above being the heir to the splendid family place. Surely he would help him. He lived very quietly, and could not be short of cash himself.

"What makes it worse," he went on desperately, "is that I told the 'Relieving Officer' there was nothing else outstanding, when he pulled me through before, and now he'll find out there was. I don't know how the deuce I did it—but, you see, this was such a big thing, and he was so beastly satirical and sneering, that somehow I got in a funk and shirked it. Hang it all, Roland," he broke off in a kind of irritable despair, "it's all very well for you, you see. You're independent of him, and are not driven to do these things; while a poor devil like me—oh, well!"

"My dear fellow, there's not the least necessity for jumping down my throat, I assure you. I wasn't going to offer an opinion on the matter. Nor am I going to lecture you—unless, perhaps, you don't mind my advising you to square this up and have done with it. I'll write you a cheque when we go upstairs."

Even while he spoke it flitted across Roland's mind that the time would probably come when, in a pecuniary sense, his own position would be insignificant in comparision with that of his younger brother. Would he have helped him, he wondered, were their positions reversed? But then Hubert was an extravagant young dog, and would in all likelihood go through life in a chronic state of "hard-up."

"By Jove, Roland, it's awfully good of you," he cried, in such a tone of genuine relief as to draw that queer smile to his brother's face. "Thanks, awfully. The fact is you've got me out of a deucedly deep hole—and—er——"

"How about by-by?" said the other, recovering himself from a stretch and a mighty yawn. "It's waxing late. Better lay hold of that candle, I've got one in my room. Come along, and we'll draw the cheque."

Hubert took the hint to say no more about it, but he

went to bed with a lighter heart than he had done for many a night. He had that cheque safe in his possession. Wiser thoughts might have prevailed in the morning—his brother might have thought better of it—might have discovered that he couldn't spare the cash—what not? He need not have feared. Whatever his faults, Roland Dorrien was incapable of going back on his word, and had the amount in question reached the limit of his worldly possessions, he would still have parted with it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FATHER AND SON.

"Do you mind coming this way, Roland?" said the General soon after breakfast the next morning. "Neville writes to say," he went on, closing the library door behind them, "that they are going to give a ball on a large scale on Friday—it's Clara's birthday—and is very anxious for you to go to Ardleigh to-morrow, and stay over it. This is Wednesday, so I suppose you may count upon nearly a week of it up there, to which, I daresay, you won't object," he added, with some significance.

"Well, I don't much care about it. I might manage the ball, but the fact is it will be rather inconvenient to go and stay there just now. Besides, I seem to have only just left."

The General frowned slightly.

"I hope you'll think better of it, Roland. You cannot really have anything to keep you from going, and Neville will take it ill if you refuse. You and Clara got on very well together when you were staying there before, didn't you?"

"Extremely well. Couldn't have got on better," assented Roland. They were coming to the point, he thought, but he would let his father work up to it in his own way. Let the adversary show his hand by all means, his own would be so much the easier to play.

For a few moments they sat in silence. The General's brows were knit as he sat thoughtfully balancing a paper-cutter between his fingers. Then looking up quickly, and speaking with the air of a man who has thought it out and quite made up his mind, he said:

"I don't know why we should fence any more with each other, Roland. It will perhaps be best, as we are alone together, to be plain and above-board. But, first of all, I

may state that I have strong reasons for wishing you to accept this invitation."

"Indeed, sir. May I ask what they are?"

The General made a movement of impatience.

"Now, can you not guess them, Roland?"

"I might—I don't say that I couldn't. But guessing is at best unsatisfactory work, and apt to lead to cross-purposes," said Roland very quietly. "As you said just now, why should we fence? What is it you wish me to do?"

The General gave a slight shake of the head, half deprecatory, half perplexed. He had not foreseen the extent of the other's quiet self-possession, and there was a determination underlying his eldest son's tone which he did not at all like.

"Well, Roland, just listen to me. You have been back in England some months now, and, I presume, intend to remain. Does it never occur to you that one with your position and prospects might employ life better than by lounging through it aimlessly as you are doing now?"

"It certainly has occurred to me. Though in the matter of position, I do not feel particularly exalted—and as for prospects, with all respect, sir, I would remind you that I am without any at present."

"This is mere fencing," answered his father testily. "By the way, your talents in that line would be of invaluable service to you at the Bar. Now, you must be perfectly well aware that your position is one of considerable importance, seeing that you must one day occupy my place here."

"It's very good of you to say so, sir," replied Roland quietly. "But," he added to himself, "if you don't flatly contradict that statement before another hour has gone over our heads, why, the age of miracles is recommencing."

"Things being so," continued his father, "it is right that you should recognise your position as my eldest son. Now did you ever contemplate the contingency of marriage?"

"I have thought of it—yes."

"Ah!" and the General's brow cleared perceptibly. "Now, we are not so badly off about here in the matter of

choice; we are fortunate in having for neighbours some good families—very good families, indeed. But I think it would be hard to find among them anyone more thoroughly suitable than Clara Neville. She is exceedingly good-looking, most accomplished and agreeable, and has plenty of sound common-sense; in short, any man might be proud of her as a wife."

"She is, indeed, all you say," assented Roland mercilessly, a sort of grim humour impelling him to draw his father thoroughly out.

"Ah! I should always have given you credit for being a man of taste, Roland," rejoined the General, with more kindness in his tone than he had used for a long time. "Then, too, she is the daughter of one of my oldest—I may say my oldest—friends, and she will inherit Ardleigh. You have seen for yourself what Ardleigh is. It is a splendid property, and adjoins this. Such an opportunity of combining the two may never—will never occur again," he continued, speaking more to himself than to his son. "And, Roland, only think what a man with such a stake in the county as Cranston and Ardleigh might do Why, his influence would be unbounded. Any career leading to the highest distinction would be open to him."

In spite of the knowledge that he himself would be the chief sufferer, Roland, as he sat listening to his father, could not help feeling a kind of pity for the disappointment which awaited the latter, when his ambitious schemes were ruthlessly shattered, as they were destined to be in a moment.

"So now you see why I wish you to accept this invitation," went on the General. "The alliance will be a most suitable one in every way, and most desirable."

"But aren't we getting on rather fast?" said Roland, thinking he saw a straw, and clutching at it instinctively. "What reason have we to suppose that Clara Neville regards me with any more favour than she does any other man?"

"I feel sure of this, Roland: if she doesn't, it'll be your own fault entirely," was the reply.

Well, that straw had gone down with him. There was now no alternative—he must declare himself. It is just

possible that, in one of weaker calibre, the temptation to procrastinate might have prevailed. The moment was not a favourable one for making his statement—indeed, it could hardly be more unfavourable; what would be easier than to put it off for a day or two? But he entertained no such idea.

"You saw a great deal of each other, I believe," went on the General, anxious over his silence. "And you have just told me you got on excellently well together?"

"So we did, and I trust we always shall. And I am sorry to be obliged to spoil your very attractive plans. I have the greatest regard for Miss Neville, but as for thinking of her as my wife, why, I can't imagine the possibility of such a thing."

It was out. The bolt had fallen. For a few moments the two sat facing each other without a word. At last the General spoke, but his voice sounded very harsh and constrained.

"Do you really mean this, Roland, or is it merely the outcome of some passing fancy of yours? Now, do nothing in a hurry. Take time—think it well over. I cannot believe that a sensible man like yourself can be blind to all the immeasurable advantages that the course I recommend would bring."

"There is one advantage which has been left out of that course, father," said Roland in a much softer tone than any he had yet employed. "That is—Love," and he paused. "Ah! well, I am very sorry to have disappointed you," he went on, as his father made no reply, "and on that account, and on that only, I wish it could have been otherwise. It is unfortunate, very, that you should have put this idea before me just now, for as a matter of fact this very day I intended to communicate to you my intention of marrying Olive Ingelow, the second daughter of the rector of Wandsborough."

The trumpet had been blown, and that with no uncertain sound. War was declared. In declining to agree to his father's plan, Roland had strayed dangerously far from his supports; in revealing his own he had burnt his boats behind him.

"So that is your intention, is it?" said his father in icy,

cutting tones, when he had recovered from the effect of the audacity of the statement.

"Yes, it is. And I venture to hope, sir, that it may have your sanction."

"Do you? But I have not the pleasure of the acquaintance of this young—lady, with whose relationship you are anxious to honour us," was the satirical reply.

"I hope you very soon will have. Then you will see that she is in every way our equal as to birth, thoroughly well educated, and as sweet-tempered as she is beautiful. Now, father, you will not go against me in this," he concluded, his face softening as he thought of Olive.

The General had risen from his seat and was pacing the room.

"My sanction?" he repeated, and it was evident that he was labouring to repress his strong excitement. "My sanction—that is what you want, is it? Then know this, Roland. As sure as you sit there you shall never have it—never. And what's more, unless you give me your word, before you leave this room, to break off this affair unconditionally, now, at once and for all, you and I are strangers henceforth—total strangers. Do you hear?"

"I do."

"Don't think that I have been ignorant of your doings all this time. Don't think that it has not been patent to us all how you preferred the society of these low adventurers to that of your own family." There was a look on Roland's face which would have warned most men to stop, but his father was not one of them. "And as for this—this young person you have chosen as an instrument for disgracing us, why, you must surely recollect that both your mother and myself witnessed her disreputable, immodest behaviour, and that on the public high road——"

"Just stop, sir—stop. What the devil do you mean by talking like this? Remember who you are talking about, please." Roland had sprung to his feet, and stood confronting his father. His face was ghastly white, but his eyes glowed like two living coals, and his hands were clenched with the firmness of a vice. "Stop, do you hear? By God, if any other man had said that——" And he paused, restraining himself with an effort.

"So, so, sir," cried the General furiously. "So you dare to stand there and threaten your father! So you dare to talk to me in this tone! You dare to stand there in your damned strength and talk to a man twice your age in that strain—I wonder Heaven does not strike you dead as you do it. But go—get away out of my sight, let me never see you again. One who can so far forget all sense of duty is no son of mine. Go! Do you hear—go!" and he pointed towards the door, his hands shaking in a perfect palsy of rage.

Roland walked to the door.

"Yes, I will go," he said, "and that before I forget myself. Good-bye. I recall anything that may have sounded like a threat. Good-bye."

"Go—go!" articulated the General, almost voiceless with rage, shaking his hand at the door. "I'd call down a curse upon you, but it's needless, for you're sure to come to the gallows some day, and after that to h—l. Go. Be off with you!" The other turned deliberately and went out. On the stairs he encountered his mother.

"What is it, Roland? What has happened? You and your father have had a dreadful quarrel, I'm afraid," she said, her cold nature roused to a state of unwonted anxiety. "Oh! dear! What is it all about?"

"Nothing, madam—except that the sweetly affectionate care and the pious home-training of my younger days is bearing its natural fruit," was his caustic reply, for he felt a very hell of fierce wrath blazing within. "And now, let me congratulate you upon having things at last exactly as you have long wished them to be."

He passed her. The hall-door shut behind him with an angry slam, and thus Roland Dorrien went out from the presence of his father—never to look upon him again in this world.

Mrs. Dorrien found her husband sitting in the study in a state of terrible exhaustion. He was a strong man for his age, but the frightful passion to which he had given way had seriously shaken him.

"Has—that—villain—gone?" he asked at length.

"Roland?—Yes. But wait—don't be in a hurry to talk. Keep quiet for a little while," she answered sadly.

"The deep-dyed scoundrel! Eleanor, if you had heard what he said to me as he stood there! Now listen to me. He is dead to us henceforth, stone dead. And tell the others—Hubert and Nellie—that if ever they mention his name in my hearing, or hold any communication with him whatever, that day they go after him."

Mrs. Dorrien assented sadly. She had got what she knew to be the secret wish of her heart. Her Hubert—her darling boy—would be Dorrien of Cranston; for she knew her husband too well to suppose he would ever relent. But it may be, furthermore, that her hard, cold nature felt a twinge of regret as she thought of this unloved son and realised that she would never see him again, and if her conscience cried loudly of maternal neglect and duties unfulfilled, we may be very sure she stifled it.

Yet this sin of omission was destined to bring upon her an awful retribution.

CHAPTER XIX.

"AND THUS WE PARTED THERE."

ROLAND DORRIEN walked from his father's door with quick, angry strides. Everything had turned out exactly as he had expected, and the halls of his ancestors would know him no more. Why should he regret it? Within them he had known nothing but coldness—had met with scant measure of affection—and now he was leaving them for ever. He passed out through the park gates with the Dorrien arms engraved upon the stone pillars—a mailed hand grasping by the neck a writhing serpent, which, with crest reared and fangs gaping wide and threatening, was in keeping with the motto underneath, "I strike"—and reached the high road. Even then he smiled satirically as he reflected that the lodge-keeper's obsequious curtsey would probably be much less profound were the good woman aware that it was only Roland Dorrien, the disinherited heir, who walked past, instead of, as she supposed, her future lord.

Suddenly he became aware of a scuffle in the park behind him, and, turning, he beheld the deer look up from their feeding and trot away in alarmed groups. Then the cause of this appeared—something red and white, tearing at full speed down the drive. A moment more, and the object dashed against him, panting, and nearly knocking him down.

"Why, Roy!" he cried in concern. "Dear old Roy! I had clean forgotten you. And they were quite capable of having you knocked on the head if they had known you were there. Perhaps he did try, as it was," he went on, with a dark look in the direction of the Hall.

But his reflections on the General were in this case unmerited. What had happened was this. Roy, who had been incarcerated in a disused coach-house, finding that

his master did not come to emancipate him at the usual time, had raised his voice in doleful protest, but when his subtle ears detected the sound of his master's receding footsteps, whose firm tread could mean nothing else than "gone for good," his piteous howls increased tenfold, emphasised by a series of frantic plunges against the large double doors. Now, it happened that Johnston, the head-gardener, who hated Roy's master with an undying hatred on account of more than one snubbing which his own impudent presumption had earned for him, and by an inverse rendering of the proverb, likewise hated Roy, thought it an excellent opportunity of wreaking his spite on the dog. So, arming himself with a broomstick, he proceeded to the scene of poor Roy's restraint.

"Hold yer rouw, ye beast—wull ye!" said Johnston spitefully, just opening a crack in the door and raising the stick cunningly. But Roy was not quite such a fool. He had withdrawn from the door and crouched away at the back of the room, growling savagely.

"Aha, ye cowardly beastie," jeered the man. "Iss-ss!" and he poked at him with the stick.

Roy was now walking to and fro, growling, and every time drawing nearer and nearer to the door, but keeping carefully out of reach of the blows which the biped brute every now and then aimed at him. Suddenly, with a terrific snarl, he made a rush. The trap-door let into the large ones flew open as he flung himself against it, and Johnston, knocked aside by the unexpected weight, rolled sprawling in the dust, and the dog was free. Pausing a moment to make his teeth meet in the thigh of his enemy as he lay, now thoroughly frightened, Roy darted off like an arrow on the track of his master, and came up with him, as we have seen.

"My dear old beauty!" said Roland, passing his hand lovingly over the smooth head, and looking down into the soft, faithful eyes. "You're worth a regiment of mere human animals! And yet they call you only a dumb, soulless brute. Well, you won't be sorry to shake the Cranston dust off your paws, anyhow. Come along!"

He turned into the footpath across the fields, which saved a mile of hot, shelterless high road, and his face never

relaxed its hard frown as he went over that terrible interview again. "Well, the old man and I opened our minds to one another with a refreshing candour, at any rate," he said, half aloud.—"Hallo!"

He stood staring blankly, not quite certain whether he was dreaming or not. For there, as if she had started out of the earth itself, was Olive—Roy meanwhile leaping around her and thrusting his importunate nose into her hand, and otherwise claiming his meed of attention.

Roland paused for a moment, staggered. She was looking very lovely, in the neatest of cool walking-dresses, and the blood rose softly to the bewitching face as she met his astonished gaze. She had seen him long before he had caught sight of her, and half shyly, half mischievously had noted the effect of the surprise. But overhearing his last reflection, the glad look changed into one of concern.

"What has happened, dear?" she began.

Instead of immediately replying he gave a couple of quick looks around, and—a few seconds afterwards Olive was readjusting a somewhat displaced hat, a soft, bright blush suffusing her face.

"There! I feel better now!" cried he who had treated her so unceremoniously, speaking with quick vehemence. "What has happened? Squalls—breakers—high seas—everything. To put it tersely, my venerable ancestor and I have been exchanging opinions of each other in terms far more forcible than polite." But Olive looked very grave.

"Oh, Roland. Was it about—about—I mean anything to do with ourselves?"

"H'm! H'm! Well, as to that, it was about things in general. But don't distress yourself, darling. It was bound to come sooner or later, and for some time past the South Cone has been hoisted on that particular coast. And now we have agreed to keep carefully out of each other's way henceforth."

"But you'll make it up again, dear. People get in a rage with each other and quarrel, but it doesn't last for ever. It would be awful if it did."

"But this will. Olive, you don't know him, and I'm

afraid, darling, you don't half know me. He would have to sing very abjectly small indeed, before I could forgive what he said—certainly no consideration of loss or gain would induce me to do so. So here I stand—as here I came—nobody."

"You are everybody to me, love," she answered bravely and cheerfully. "All will come right one of these days, and even if not, we cannot do without each other, whatever we can do without."

Sunshine after storm: balm to the wounded spirit. It is probable that, for the time being, all considerations were forgotten, except that they were alone together. The summer air breathed warm and free around them. Underfoot the grass, recently mown, was short and turfy, beneath the shade of the trees couched a few lazy, ruminating sheep, and the drowsy roll of a mill-wheel, with its accompanying drip-drip of water, was just audible, but everything was soft and slumbrous in the silent meadows. They were alone—and he who had just bartered away his splendid birthright for the love of this girl beside him, felt that he had his reward. He could hardly believe that not an hour had passed since that tornado scene of wrathful passion in yonder Hall, which they could just discern through the trees.

"But, Olive, how on earth did you put in an appearance here just in the nick of time?" he asked presently.

"Pure accident. I had been visiting two bed-ridden crones whom Margaret had promised to go and see, but couldn't. The path leading home struck into yours—so—so I couldn't help being behind you and hearing your wicked words—and they were dreadfully wicked," she answered mischievously. "But—hark!"

A male voice was heard approaching, alternately whistling and singing snatches of a popular song of the day, then a tall, active figure cleared the stile in front of them and drew up short.

"Hallo!"

"Oh, Eusty, you disgraceful defaulter. Is that how you keep your promises?" cried Olive. "Didn't you vow you would come and meet me, and now I've had to walk through two fields full of horrid cows all by myself—and

it's no thanks to you that I haven't been frightened to death."

"Oh, here—ahem—I say, hold hard!" cried the Oxonian, quizzically surveying the pair. "All by yourself—eh? Well, it strikes me, young woman, you've fallen in with a pretty substantial escort."

"But not until I had passed the cows, you detestable boy," replied she, with a tinge of colour in her bright, laughing face.

"I say, Dorrien, she implies that you're nobody," went on her brother, without heeding her. "Says she had to come along all by herself. Rough on you, that—eh?"

Roland laughed, and coming to the rescue turned the scale of "chaff" against Eustace, who was fain to acknowledge at last that he was in a minority, and to cry quarter.

"Hallo, Dorrien, don't sheer off," cried Eustace, as, having reached the town, a halt suddenly took place. "Tack in and get your eye-teeth into some cold sirloin, *anglicè*—lunch!"

But the other shook his head.

"Oh, stow all that," went on the reckless youth in response to some excuse. "Now, don't let's have any more talk over it, but 'bout ship and steer for the ecclesiastical hang-out. There are only our two selves. The reverend Padre won't be in till this afternoon, and the other girls have gone out to lunch at the Gaskells. Olive, tell him he must. He'll obey orders from you."

Roland hesitated. He had frequently dropped in in this informal way, and now the temptation to sit for an hour at the same table with Olive, with the prospect of a whole afternoon of her society, was strong. But he remembered that his negotiations with her father were still pending, and he had a shrewd idea that the next interview might not go off quite so pleasantly. Meanwhile, it might strike the rector in the light of a shabby thing, were he in a sort of way to steal a march upon him in his absence. So he heroically and steadfastly refused. Had he known what was to happen within the next twenty-four hours he would probably have yielded.

"I'll look round later," he said. "I want to see the rector as soon as he comes in. That'll do instead, Eustace, won't it?"

"Hang it! I suppose it must!" was the careless reply.

And then he bade good-bye to Olive. Only a pressure of the hand, and a look into each other's eyes—no sweet, clinging embrace. An unceremonious good-bye, as between people who expect to meet again in the course of the same day, no murmured word of love and trust and moving farewell. Yet perhaps it was better so. A little nod and a bright smile as she turned away, and thus they parted, these two. Little recked they how and where they would meet again.

Roland turned away in a very restless, dissatisfied frame of mind. Everything seemed to be working round unfavourably. The rector might not return home till late, and meanwhile he was condemned to these hours of waiting. Though cool enough in an emergency, he was of a nervous disposition, and uncertainty and inaction in a matter of this kind was intolerable. Everything assumed an exaggerated aspect. What if the rector should, after all, refuse his consent? Hitherto he had not believed Dr. Ingelow would offer any serious opposition; now, on turning things over, it seemed first possible, then only too probable, that he might. And Olive—he felt pretty certain she would, however reluctantly, refuse to disregard her father's wishes, once they were clearly laid down; nor in his heart of hearts would he have desired that she should, paradoxical as it may seem. Lovers are proverbially selfish, and it might be that Roland Dorrien was less so than the general man. He had lived his life very much alone, with the result that he had thought much, and developed a maturity of judgment considerably beyond his years. How could he expect this girl to give up her bright, happy home—how happy he himself had had ample opportunity of observing—to wound, beyond all healing, those who had surrounded her life with every tenderness and care, at the bidding of one whom, six months ago, she had hardly heard of? He knew that he had won her heart as no man would ever again win it, yet he would despise himself were he to require such a sacrifice of her. No,

the only thing would be to wait for more favourable times.

So the afternoon wore on, and his restlessness increased more and more. He could not read, thinking was worse, and there was no one to talk to. Well, he would stroll round towards the Rectory again. This time luck favoured him. As he approached it he caught sight of Dr. Ingelow coming from the opposite direction, and the two met at the gate.

"Ah, I was half expecting you yesterday," said the rector, as they shook hands. "But come into the study. There we shan't be disturbed."

"And I fully intended to have returned yesterday," replied Roland, when they were seated. "But the fact is, my father didn't get back till late, and I had no opportunity of speaking to him until this morning."

"Yes. And——"

"The result was precisely what I expected. He was utterly unreasonable and impracticable. In short, Dr. Ingelow, I don't see how I can avoid explaining that he has a violent prejudice against you and yours. That may have had a great deal to do with it, but he had reasons of his own, which, as they concern others, I am hardly at liberty to mention. Anyhow, I could not for a moment think of falling in with his views, and the result was a regular row."

"Do you mean that you quarrelled?" asked the rector.

"If a tolerably brisk interchange of compliments, and a mutual agreement to keep carefully out of each other's way for the rest of our mutual lives constitute a quarrel—and I rather think they do—why, then I must admit we did," was the grim reply, and his face grew dark over the recollection thus revived.

"Excuse me, Dorrien—you see I always consider myself to a certain extent privileged—but I can see at a glance that you're a quick-tempered man. Now, isn't it just possible that you were rather hasty?" said the rector, in his kindest manner, bending a searching glance upon the young man. "I mean," he went on in response to a decided shake of the head, "you may have forgotten that, however harsh—even unjust, as you think—your father may be, you still

owe him a certain amount of respect—of duty. Nothing can get rid of that fact."

Roland looked up quickly.

"Duty!" he echoed, with an intensity of bitterness which was not lost upon the other. "Duty! My dear sir, I can assure you that that very word formed subject matter for a pretty lively discussion between us, ending as I have described. However, to drop these wretched family details, which must be most tedious to you, you see now I have done my best to meet your wishes, and if I have failed it has been through no fault of my own—that I can say with a perfectly clear conscience." He spoke with a suppressed eagerness which had been absent from his speech in their first interview. Then the last thing he had anticipated was failure in this quarter; now it was different.

The rector shook his head deprecatorily.

"I don't like to hear you take that tone. I fear your view of the relation between father and son cannot be borne out. The Fifth Commandment is explicit on the point. But there, this isn't the time for sermonising, you'll say," he added with a grave, kind smile. "Only, the idea of a breach of this relationship is, to my mind, one of the most painful things in the world."

Roland looked unconvinced. He conjectured rightly that the good priest's early youth had been fortunate in its natural guardians, and now his own children adored him, which made all the difference.

"You will think me bold in stating that the religious side of the question does not weigh with me in the least—circumstances alter cases," was his reply. "And at any rate, Dr. Ingelow, you will allow that I have never tried to win your favour by feigning a religion which I did not feel. However, to confine ourselves to the matter in hand. I have tried my utmost to satisfy you in what you asked, and have failed. But as I am perfectly in a position to marry independently of my father's consent, I trust your answer will be favourable."

Outwardly calmness itself, the rector was in reality much perplexed. A terrible family quarrel had taken place, indirectly owing to him and his—a reflection

sufficiently distressing to one of his refinement of feeling. Then, again, this young man must not be allowed to throw up his prospects for life in a fit of rash impulse and hot temper. No—at all costs this must be prevented.

"We will waive the question of duty," he said. "But is there no chance of a reconciliation? Surely there is. When you get to my age you will realise that life is too short for these prolonged feuds; quarrels between blood relations are of all things the most heart-rending, and the day may come when you will bitterly regret this one. And then, to take a lower ground. How can you, in a moment of anger, and all for the sake of a few hasty words, throw up your really splendid prospects? And how can I be a party to your doing so. Surely you must see that it is impossible."

"There is no chance of any reconciliation," answered Roland deliberately. "I would hardly forgive one or two of the things he dared to say, even if he were to go down on his knees and beg me to—and I think even you would hardly expect him to do that. As for what you are good enough to call 'a few hasty words,' I tell you we exchanged opinions of each other that would have made your hair stand on end could you have heard us; nor was that all. In the matter of prospects, I have always considered my chances of ever possessing Cranston to be so very vague and shadowy as not seriously worth reckoning in the light of prospects. And then, look what such 'prospects' would involve. Perhaps twenty years of absolute slavery to the whims and caprices of the hardest and most unloving of masters. Only think of that! And at fifty I might find myself in possession, and Heaven knows I should deserve to. So, in renouncing these most shadowy prospects, this morning, I could not feel that I was actually undergoing any real loss. But I thought I had made all this clear to you yesterday—I mean as regarded the uncertainty of any prospects beyond the actual means in my possession," he added in an anxious tone.

"I don't think you understand me, Mr. Dorrien," said the rector, rather stiffly. "I might have hoped you would have known me better than to suppose that I was reasoning otherwise than disinterestedly in this matter of your

eventually possessing Cranston or not; or that the latter contingency would detract in my eyes from your eligibility to become my daughter's husband, you being otherwise in a satisfactory position. What I did mean to convey was this. You are young now; all your feelings and aspirations are strong, and warm, and healthful, and you are capable of self-sacrifice; you dearly love my child. I can see that readily enough, although you are not one of the effusive order of lovers," he went on, his tone softening, and a quiet, kindly smile gleaming in his eyes. "You would make any sacrifice for her—and for all this I honour you. But, as I said before, you are young. Well. You give up this inheritance, and you do so cheerfully. Middle age comes on, and you see what should have been yours in other hands. You are a stranger in the home of your ancestors—you have the cares and vexations—aye, and the disappointments of life crowding upon you, while another enjoys in ease and luxury your noble birthright, which has then passed away from you for ever. How will you feel then? Will you have the strength resolutely to bear up against this most mortifying contrast, to banish the thought of it far from you—or will it embitter—eventually perhaps crush the remainder of your existence? This is what I have been thinking of while we have been sitting here. Now have *you* thought of it?"

He laid his hand on the other's arm with an affectionate gesture, and his dark eyes were full of sympathy as he bent his glance upon the young man's face, awaiting the answer.

"I have thought of it, Dr. Ingelow," was the quiet reply. "I had already done so—had weighed the pros and cons most carefully before I spoke to you yesterday. And——" He stopped short. He was nearly giving the rector an inkling of the other insurmountable obstacle which stood in the way of reconciliation, and any material advantage it might bring with it, but with a natural distaste for discussing family matters with an outsider—however sympathetic—he forebore. Had he not done so, it is possible that the answer to his wishes might have been different; as it was, Dr. Ingelow would not give up the notion that the quarrel between Roland and his father, however grave, was

yet capable of being healed, and it was not for him, a Christian priest, irrespective of other considerations, to be the means of widening the breach.

"Well now, Dorrien," he went on, after pausing to allow the other to continue the remark if he wished, "you must see yourself in what an extremely difficult position I am placed. How can I allow my child to marry into a family which positively refuses to receive her? I cannot do so, I fear, with any consideration for our own self-respect. Then, apart from that, you are man of the world enough to know that nothing remains private for long, and that this family quarrel of yours will soon be in everybody's mouth. Now, I ask you, how can I and mine accept the position of arch-mischief-makers, feud fomenters, schemers —call it what you will—in which common consent will place us when it becomes known how you have renounced your brilliant worldly prospects for Olive's sake? Put yourself into my place for a moment—that may bring it home to you. No, Dorrien, surely you must see that this is a position we cannot consent to occupy, and, honoured as we are by your proposal, I fear we must pain you by declining it—for the present, at any rate."

Roland did not answer at once. In the rector's decided tones he felt that his fate was sealed. There was no getting over this opposition, and now, day by day, an insurmountable barrier would rise between him and his love. The room seemed to go round with him—the heavily-bound, solemn-looking volumes, the carved chairs, the still, white Christ upon the black cross in the niche, all passed in succession before his eyes.

"And yet I had thought, Dr. Ingelow," he said at last, and his voice was thick and unsteady, "that you, if any man, would be above mere worldly considerations, when the life's happiness of two people was in the balance."

"My dear boy, don't—pray don't talk in that awfully desponding tone," said the rector, moved to the heart by the utter dejection set forth upon the other's countenance. "Now, listen," and going over to him he placed his hands upon his shoulders, in heart-felt, sympathetic touch. "Wait a little while, then do your best to make up this

lamentable difference—who knows but what you may succeed far more readily than you think? Then you shall have my hearty consent."

"That will be never," came the reply, quiet, but decided. "The thing is impossible. So I suppose you will tell me that it's a case of resigning oneself to the will of Providence," he continued in a tone of indescribable bitterness, and with an approach to a sneer.

The other made no reply, and for some moments there was silence. There was not a spark of anger or resentment in the priest's heart at the implied scoff, and the compassion in his countenance deepened as he gazed upon the man before him, plunged in the depths of disappointment. He was no mean judge of character, and he had seen much in Roland Dorrien to like and admire—yet he felt sure that the course he himself had adopted in the present instance was the right—in fact, the only safe one.

And Roland himself? As he sat there he was going through a mighty struggle. He had tried fair means and failed, now he would be justified in employing foul, said the tempter. If he could induce Olive surreptitiously to link her lot with his, why then, when the step was irremediable, her father would soon forgive her. The rector was the very last man to bear rancour, especially towards his favourite child. He would soon come round, and then how happy they would all be! The end in this case would amply justify the means, and then—was not all fair in love and war? No, it was not. Roland Dorrien had a code of honour of his own. Had Dr. Ingelow been such a man as his own father, for instance, he would have felt abundantly justified in throwing all scruple to the winds, but now he could not do it. He had sat at this man's table and been treated by him in every respect as a trusted friend. His doors had ever been open to him to come and go as he listed, he had been admitted unreservedly and welcomed in this family circle at a time when in his own home he was a stranger. Months had passed in this pleasant, trustful intimacy, and now he felt that he would rather die than betray the confidence of this kindly, open-hearted friend, for whom, in spite of what had happened, he felt no whit less of warm regard. It would be a mean and shabby

trick, the very thought of which he would strive to put far from him.

"Forgive me," he said at length. "I am an unmannerly brute to talk like that. A cad, in fact."

"Roland, my dear boy," answered the rector in his most affectionate tone, casting all ceremony to the winds. "Believe me, I have already forgotten it, whatever it was. Now try and face your trouble bravely—you are not alone in it, remember. And, Roland, you will not—not attempt to see Olive alone until—at any rate until I have spoken to her. You are too honourable for that, I know."

"I will not. But, Dr. Ingelow, I cannot promise to give her up altogether. It is only fair to tell you that."

The rector shook his head sadly.

"I am afraid you must bring yourself to face facts," he replied, as they clasped hands. "Good-bye. We need not look upon each other as enemies on account of this, need we?" he added, laying an affectionate, detaining hand on the other's shoulder. "Good-bye for the present—and, God bless you!"

CHAPTER XX.

DARKER STILL.

"THINGS are never so bad but that they might be worse," is a clap-trap disguised beneath the gold leaf of philosophy. When a man's leg has to come off—without chloroform—it doesn't make the impending "bad quarter of an hour" a bit less redoubtable to impress upon him the indisputable fact that he *might* have had to lose an arm as well.

When Roland awoke the next morning—he had engaged a room in the principal inn at Wandsborough—it seemed as if the outlook before him was about as black as it could be. He had made an enormous sacrifice for love, and all in vain; the fruition of that love was denied him. Wrapped in gloomy reflections, he hardly noticed a letter lying beside his bed. It had come the previous evening, but he had chucked it aside as not worth bothering about. Now he took it up and carelessly tore it open. Suddenly an alarming change came over his features, an awful, rigid, grey look, as if he had been suddenly turned to stone. This is what he read:

"MY DEAR DORRIEN,—

"I am rather afraid that I shall be the first to make known some confoundedly bad news. In a word the Tynnestop Bank has 'gone,' and the smash is complete. Now the question is, have you got rid of those shares of yours or not—you know we were talking about it when you were up here? If not, I'm deuced sorry for you, for I fear there's no chance—the smash is too thorough, and it's supposed they won't pay sixpence in the £. Bang they went! without a symptom of warning, and everyone's asking how on earth it was managed so quietly. If you think it'll be any good, run up here and talk things over.

"Believe me, old fellow,

"Yours, &c., &c.,

"JOHN VENN."

"P.S.—I'm bitten myself to a small amount—trusteeship—d——d fool's trade. But it's you shareholders who'll be most heavily shot, I'm afraid. I send a couple of papers with an account of the crash—in case you haven't seen it."

Again and again he read through the letter, which had been addressed to the rector's care, till Venn's large, business-like caligraphy seemed burnt into his brain; then he tore open the newspapers. The affair was plain enough. The Bank was an unlimited concern, and every farthing he had in the world except his last half-yearly dividend was invested in its shares, and now it had fallen with a crash. Roland Dorrien was a ruined man.

A groan escaped his dry, set lips.

"Good God! Nothing like piling it up," he muttered. "If this isn't a day full of happiness! Well, this must have happened before yesterday morning, otherwise I might be induced to believe in the efficacy of curses, and that my very affectionate parent's influence with the Devil stands higher than mine; but it came about too early for that to have anything to do with it."

He laughed—a horrible, blood-curdling mockery of a laugh—as the thought crossed his mind that he might have occasion to decide whether, under all the circumstances, life was really worth living any longer.

Two hours later, and he is on his way to London. Every familiar landmark is out of sight, but imagination carries him back. Had he known what fate held in store for him, was it possible that that stormy interview might never have taken place? The temptation would have been great. Yesterday, at that hour, life had looked very fair, very promising to him, and now, in less than twenty-four hours, he had lost his inheritance—his love—and his means of existence.

And now how light seem the first obstructions which lay in his road yesterday, compared with this last terrible disaster! His renunciation of his birthright—the rector's opposition—now appear to him as very trifles. The first he had made up his mind to—the second could in time have been got over—but now? Love was a luxury he

could not afford to indulge in—even life itself must henceforth be dragged out in labour and sorrow and desolation, that is, should he ultimately decide that it is worth dragging on at all on such terms. For now, of course, he must give up Olive, release her from all in the shape of a promise or understanding. It might be years and years before he could even keep himself decently, how then could he in honour hold her bound to him, condemn her to spend the best and brightest years of her life in weary waiting; and for what? For a broken, disappointed man, utterly without prospects and without hopes. Would she grieve for him? At first she would suffer—suffer acutely, he knew; but her bright, sunny spirits would carry her through, and she would—well, in time, forget him. And the unfortunate man almost groaned aloud as he leaned in the corner of the railway carriage, his eyes strained and distended upon the ceaseless downpour without, and the sodden landscape lying beneath its lowering veil of ashen cloud.

There is as a rule something exasperating about the way in which our friends take our misfortunes. If we are of a morbidly sensitive disposition they affect a facial elongation and a tone of dismal sympathy; if, on the other hand, we are accustomed to present a careless front to the world, they overwhelm us with a cheerful light-heartedness which strikes us as brutally callous—as though, indeed, we could look for anything else in a thoroughly self-seeking world. "Every man for himself, and devil take the hindermost." Are you in the latter category? "Awfully sorry, my dear fellow—only wish I could help you—but—well, perhaps you will find ranking among His Satanic Majesty's acquisitions not quite such an uncomfortable berth as you think—and then, you know, you're sure to get out of it soon—something's sure to turn up. Well—ta-ta—old chap, sorry I can't wait——" And the world rolls on.

Roland was conscious of a latent feeling of resentment as he noted the comfortable and even light-hearted expression on his friend's face. "Looks as if the fellow hadn't a care in the world, d—n it," was his mental comment.

"Hallo, Dorrien! I'm deuced glad to see you, but awfully sorry I can't give you any cheering news," began the other.

"I know you're the sort of fellow who wouldn't thank me for trying to make things out promising when they're bad as bad can be—and that's just what I'm afraid they are. You see, the mischief of it is that it's an unlimited concern."

"Yes," assented Roland drearily.

"By the way, I got your line this morning and would have met you at the train, but I've had an awfully busy day of it. I've been going into your affair too; you know, I do a lot in the way of share-broking."

"And it's all up!"

"It is. You would hardly credit the widespread ruin a smash of this kind involves. Why, there are people who were rolling in wealth yesterday, who to-morrow will be destitute beggars. And there's no foretelling the extent of the calls which will be made on the shareholders. But I say though, Dorrien, don't be so confoundedly down in the mouth, man. It's rough on you to lose a snug little income, but then you've got Cranston to fall back upon. By Jove! I wouldn't mind changing shoes with you this very day. Why, when you're doing Squire of Cranston you'll laugh at all this."

He laughed now—a hollow mockery of a laugh, like a smile forced to the face of a galvanised corpse.

"Don't you remember my telling you that Cranston wasn't entailed?" he said abruptly.

"Yes, but hang it! it'll come to the same thing in the end. And now your governor will——"

"—See me to the devil with all the pleasure in life," was the sneering reply. "Why, man, we had the most infernal shindy yesterday ever kicked up between two full-blown lunatics. So now you may perhaps realise the exceeding roseate hue of my prospects in life."

Venn gave vent to a whistle and looked grave.

"Oh, but—he'll come round in time," he began lamely.

"Deuce a bit. I tell you the brake of my coach has given way and that successful vehicle is starting down hill now—off to the devil as hard as it can lick. Even that mythical old humbug, Job, had his afflictions come upon him by relays; mine came all in one day, as you'd readily see, if you knew the facts."

CHAPTER XXI.

JOHNSTON AT FAULT.

EUSTACE INGELOW sat in the summer-house at the back of the Rectory garden smoking his after-breakfast pipe, and with him his youngest sister, Sophie, doing some needlework.

They were discussing a letter which the former had received from the absent Roland, also an eventuality concerning Johnston, the Cranston gardener, and the bite he had received from Roy.

"Do you think that abominable fellow really intends to bring an action against him?" the girl was saying.

"He does. He says he's lamed for life. It's an arrant lie, of course, on a par with that one about going into the coach-house to fetch a broom and Roy flying at him. However, he won't get Dorrien's whereabouts out of me, and I'm rather certain no one else knows it."

The fact was, that Johnston, seeing a good opportunity, in the mishap which had befallen him, of being revenged on Roy and his master, and withal extracting from the latter's pocket considerable compensation, had complained to his employer in the first instance. But to his surprise the General curtly and fiercely refused to listen to him, and the man, seeing that another word on the subject would gravely imperil his place, and not to be baulked, resolved to bring an action for damages against the dethroned heir.

Sophie plied her needle thoughtfully for a few moments. Then she looked up.

"Eusty, does Ro—er—Mr. Dorrien, say anything about coming back?"

"N—no. He's sure to be back though, soon. But, I say, you'd better apply to Olive for information on that score."

The girl shook her golden head sadly.

"Eusty, can you keep a secret? Because, if you can—I'll tell you one. Well then, I think there's something wrong—in the first place, from odds and ends I've heard out of doors, in the next—er—well—one needn't look far from home. And dad had a letter from Mr. Dorrien this morning, and how awfully quiet he was all breakfast-time!"

"There was a deuce of a row between Dorrien and his cantankerous old reprobate of an ancestor—he let out as much as that to me," said Eustace. "Poor old chap—I hope he'll turn up again soon."

"So do I," echoed the girl. "We don't see many nice people here—at least not nice men—and he always was such fun."

"Rather. Especially when you got him quietly over a weed. The quaint, dry sentiments of the fellow were enough to make a cat perish with laughter. Poor old Dorrien! I hope we shall soon have him back as jolly as ever. Hallo!—By George, there's that rascal Johnston himself. Seedy looking cad with him—perhaps an attorney."

They peered through the thick foliage of the arbour, and approaching from the other end of the gravel walk was the Cranston gardener and his companion, whom a servant was apparently directing towards their retreat.

"By Jove!" chuckled Eustace. "Now for some fun. Tell you what, Sophie. I'll read them Dorrien's post-script."

"Better not," objected his more prudent sister. "No, dear, don't. There'd only be a row, and I'm so frightened of rows."

"Pooh! I'd chuck the pair of 'em through the hedge,"

"And they'd summon you, and dad would be annoyed, and there'd be no end of bother. Now, Eusty, be a good boy, won't you, and——" But she had no time for further remonstrance, for the two men had by this time reached the arbour, and stood looking sheepish and awkward, as if each expected the other to begin.

"Ah! good day, Johnston. Anything I can do for you? But—who's your friend?" said Eustace with a careless nod.

"I ask yer pardon, sir, and the young leddy's, for in-

truding, but I thought ye might a' heard from Mr. Roland. And ye said if ye did ye'd kindly let me know." This was a fact. Eustace, intending to "draw" the Scot, had promised him that much.

"Yes?"

"And—have ye, sir?"

"Yes."

And Eustace, taking out his pouch, proceeded with the utmost coolness to refill and light his pipe.

"And, if I might make so bold, sir, what does he say?" asked the man anxiously.

"Well, to be candid with you, Johnston, I think you'll get no change out of him at all. He won't even listen to your idea."

"Begging your pardon, sir," said the stranger, in response to an appealing look from his companion—"begging your pardon, sir, but wouldn't it be much better that Mr. Dorrien should come to some understanding with my friend, here, instead of compelling him to go to law? Now, wouldn't it?"

"Begging yours—but I haven't the pleasure of your acquaintance," replied Eustace, eyeing the speaker with perfect coolness. "Is this your legal adviser, Johnston?"

"Eh, no, sir. It's just my cousin, who knows the law as well as most lawyers, and——"

"Well, it can't possibly be his business, and I shall decline to discuss it with him," decisively went on Eustace, who had a dim recollection of having seen the seedy, ferret-nosed individual before him in the office of a Battisford attorney, where he occupied a position, half clerk, half errand-runner. "And for the matter of that, Johnston, it's none of mine either, and I may as well tell you so. So I'm afraid I can't help you any further."

"And ye won't give me his address?"

"Whose?"

"Meester Dorrien's."

"No."

"But perhaps we can mak' ye," answered Johnston, whose tone was gradually becoming less respectful and more threatening.

Eustace turned slightly in his chair—his tall, fine frame

the picture of listless ease, and cool self-possession in every feature of his handsome face.

"Eh? I didn't quite catch?" he said suavely, merely lifting an eye-brow.

The Cranston gardener, who had obtained his position of awe among the little community of his colleagues and dependents by mere bluster and bullying, was an arrant coward at heart, and simply dared not repeat his remarks.

"But, my dear sir," began the other insinuatingly, cutting him short in the middle of a whining speech about poor men being denied their rights—"my dear sir, don't you see——"

"I'm afraid not," was the imperturbable reply. "At least I see this—that no good will come of discussing the concern any further. But—eh—by the way, Johnston, you didn't poke at the dog at all—with a stick, for instance, did you?"

The man's face changed colour, and Eustace, who was watching him narrowly, detected it at once. It was only a random shot, but it had evidently hit the mark.

"Ah! well," he went on carelessly, "in any case it doesn't much matter. And now, I suppose, we have nothing further to discuss. So I'll say good-day——"

Both men stood irresolute for a moment. Then they turned to go.

"Aweel, sir, it's a queer warrld," said Johnston, "and, of course, we must just help each other. An' if ever I get a chance o' doing you a good turn I hope I'll do it."

"That I'm sure you will, Johnston," carelessly assented Eustace, fully alive to the irony and veiled vow of vengeance in this speech, and hardly able to contain his mirth, so comic was the expression of baffled malice which the man strove to conceal. "Well, good-day, again!"

"Eusty," said his sister, when they were out of earshot. "You'd better look out. I'm sure that horrid man will have his revenge, somehow."

"Pooh! A couple of mean-spirited cads. For two pins I'd have chucked the pair of 'em into the fish-pond. The impudence of the dogs! The very sight of them evoked in me what old Medlicott defined in his sermon the other

night as 'a surging of the worst passions of our fallen human nature.'"

All the same he was destined to learn—and that before very long—that the Scotchman's significant promise might not prove so harmless as he imagined.

While Eustace was making merry over his friend's letter, the rector was cogitating over a very different style of communication, though from the same source. In it the writer set forth briefly and circumstantially the completeness of his own ruin, adding, that as a beggar and penniless, he had now no alternative but to take as final the answer which the rector had given on the occasion of their last meeting. There was one thing more—an enclosure directed to Olive, and this the writer ventured to hope might be handed to her. He had purposely left the envelope open in case Dr. Ingelow should prefer to peruse its contents, but in any event he trusted it might be delivered, as it was the last communication that would pass between them. It was characteristic of the old priest's honourable and generous nature, that his first act was to fasten down the flap of the envelope then and there.

Now the letter was curt, stiff and constrained in wording, but its recipient could "read between the lines." He knew the world thoroughly, and his insight into that most complex of machinery, the human heart, was all but exhaustive, and now, as he sat with the open letter before him, he could gauge with wonderful exactitude the state of mind of its unfortunate writer. Its very curtness was the outcome of a studied expression of feeling, as of one who should nerve himself to the numbing consciousness of sudden and overwhelming ruin. This man had lost all which made life valuable to him. It had fallen from him, one might say, in a single day. How would he bear it?

"Poor fellow—poor fellow! He is ruined, indeed!" broke from the old priest's lips, as he turned over the whole situation in his mind. "What will become of him?"

He thought of the mutual liking that had sprung up between them—of their many pleasant interchanges of ideas and experiences—their reminiscences of the Great Wild West, gone over together many a time during the cheerful

evening meal—and how these things had carried him back to the life and spirit of adventure of his own youth. He thought of the unfortunate man now plunged in ruin and despair, and the picture thus conjured up moved and distressed him more than he cared to own. During the few months of their acquaintance he had accurately read Roland Dorrien's character, and now felt pretty certain that it was not of the sort to gain by such a blow as this last. He remembered remorsefully the dark, reckless face as he had last seen it, full of impatience, resentment and stormy passions, and knew too well that the owner of that face was not the man to accept misfortune as a thing to rise superior to and over-rule to his own ultimate good. No! for him he feared the worst.

Then his eye fell once more upon the enclosure. He took it up thoughtfully. It was not strange that the writer should have sent it to him first instead of forwarding it direct by post, but the act was highly creditable to Dorrien's sense of honour. He conveyed a covert hint, too, in the letter to himself that they would probably never meet again. It was all terribly sad, and now with characteristic scrupulosity the rector blamed himself severely for unnecessary harshness. Yes, he had been hard and unfeeling in that interview. The poor fellow was now overwhelmed in the bitterness of his ruin, to an extent which he was too proud to show, and desperate. He was a man of little or no religion, consequently a man without hope—and thus thinking, a warm wave of pity swept over the old priest's heart. Could nothing be done for this lonely, uncared-for wanderer—nothing to raise him from where he had gone down beneath the rising tide of adverse fortune? Yes—it could and it should. He would go himself and seek him out and convey to him that he was not without friends; nor would he confine himself only to words of sympathy and friendship, but would think what offer of material aid he could make. Ah! but—would it be accepted? The man was proud. A man who had deliberately put away such a position as Roland Dorrien had done would be difficult to deal with. And for the first time it struck him that he had made far too light of that affair, and the conviction began to dawn upon him, that

come what might, no reconciliation would ever take place now between General Dorrien and his son. And what would become of the latter? Again and again the rector's sensitive conscience smote him. Had he been a little less decisive in refusing his consent—had he left the other some ground for hope, it might be the saving of him now—might act as an incentive to him to rise above his troubles. Yes—he must see what could be done, and that without loss of time.

Then, taking the now sealed letter, he went upstairs to find Olive.

"Something for you, darling," he said in his tenderest tone.

"Yes, father. What is it? Oh!"

Her face paled and her hand trembled slightly as she caught sight of the well-known writing, and there was a terrible air of wistfulness in her eyes. Ever since the day her father had told her—with all the consideration and gentleness he could command, as well as with decision—that he could not consent to anything between Roland Dorrien and herself, and had so carefully reasoned out the matter that she could not in her inmost heart accuse him of harshness or injustice—ever since the day her lover had left the place suddenly and without a word of explanation, Olive had been as one metamorphosed. Her brightness and unquenchable flow of spirits had left her; she seldom smiled, never laughed, and spoke but little.

Now she gained her room, and having locked herself in tore open the letter. It consisted of several sheets, closely written, and as she read on, the girl's eyes were dimmed with tears, and at last she could go no further—great, choking, heart-broken sobs were all that she was conscious of. It was a strange letter—there was something solemn and awe-inspiring about it, for it was written as a man might write when certain that he has but a few hours to live, and yet every now and then, it would be traversed by a gleam of humour that was heart-rending, so obvious was it that this was brought in only when the anguish of the writer became too unbearable. Yet there was not a trace of self-pity in the letter from beginning to end. It was all on her account that his misgivings were set forth. As for

himself, well, he took a lot of killing, and supposed he must endure things as they were—and, for her, Time might work wonders, and she might live to be happy yet, far happier than she could ever be if tied to a thoroughly broken and disappointed man like himself; and so her father's decision was right after all. His day was done; ruin had come upon him, out of which nothing could save him, and if she could learn to forget him, all the better for herself, for henceforth to all who had ever known him he must be as one dead.

Then it all came back to her in a moment. She had resented his departure without a word—now she saw how he had been bound in honour not to speak it. She had felt proud, hurt and angry, while all the time he had been crushed beneath an accumulation of ruin and the woe that it involved. How she loved him now—how her heart went out to him in his adversity as it would never have done in his prosperity—how she longed and thirsted to be with him in this dark hour of his distress! All those bright, beautiful summer months passed before her, with their golden hours of love and sweetness and peace—and now! Those first furtive glances exchanged in the church, that accidental meeting on the beach, and the many rambles and long hours together, all rose up to mock her—and the moment when she had tottered between life and death on the slippery cliff-path—with him. And now he was gone—gone for ever—and she was left.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHAT WANDSBOROUGH SAID.

It may seem strange that to a man of Dr. Ingelow's standard of principle and pronounced beliefs, such a cordial intimacy as that which had sprung up between himself and Roland Dorrien should be possible; still more so, that apart from the drawbacks we have narrated, and which were purely mundane, he should be ready to accept him as a son-in-law. Yet he was—and without prejudice to his own principles.

No man living was more thoroughly free from bigotry than the rector of Wandsborough. Principle was one thing—sitting on the judgment seat, quite another. So, although he suspected Roland Dorrien's private opinions to border very closely upon infidelity, yet he did not consider him a subject for social ostracism on that account. Indeed, had the man shown a devout disposition in the face of early bringing up and subsequent associations, he would have looked upon him in the light of a natural curiosity. Roland was just the sort of man whom the ordinary Anglican parson would have regarded with lofty disapproval. But then Dr. Ingelow was by no means an ordinary Anglican parson.

Of course, Wandsborough was not long in finding out that Roland Dorrien's place in its midst would know him no more, and its curiosity once awakened, it caught eagerly at the few "straws" floating on the wind of popular report, and proceeded to piece together many romantic and preposterous stories therewith. Dark rumours as to that stormy scene in the study at Cranston Hall began to leak out. Servants have long tongues and still longer ears, and more than one virtuous domestic had stood on mental tip-toe, pausing in his or her then occupation, to listen intently as the sound of angry voices pro-

ceeded from the dread sanctum. Before night, the story had not only permeated Cranston village, but had been whispered in Wandsborough, and Roland's abrupt departure the next day seemed a direct challenge to all tongues.

What a good time of it had Miss Munch and Mrs. Bunch *et hoc genus omne!* Now was the time for unearthing all the little bits of half-forgotten scandal and tagging them together, and weaving them into a deliciously parti-coloured whole, amid much head-wagging and "didn't I tell you how it would be?"—"and it wasn't likely that such a one as Roland Dorrien would bury himself in a dull place like Wandsborough, and hardly ever be with his own people, for nothing." First it was rumoured that the General and his son had had a stand up fight in the former's study, then that they had thrown all the chairs and tables at each other. The more oracular declared that nothing short of a duel had taken place, and least said soonest mended; and thus the ball rolled, until the bare facts that actually were known or guessed at, became quite too prosaic for credence.

But what had it all been about? "Ah! haven't you heard?" And then the mysterious nods and winks would increase tenfold, and the whispered communication would be received in various ways according to the temperament or capacity for humbug of the hearer—but always with a thirst for more particulars. For instance, why should Mr. Dorrien have interested himself on behalf of that precious rascal, Gipsy Steve? Must it not have been on Lizzie's account, and, of course, all young men were desperately wicked, and anyone with half an eye could see through *that* brick wall; and so the matter had come to the General's ears. But this story was very soon improved upon, and presently it was that Gipsy Steve had sworn to shoot the young Squire unless he did justice to Lizzie—and it was while Roland was making this announcement to his father, that the latter had hurled an inkstand at his head, and now he had made himself scarce, fearing the ex-poacher's vengeance. Others again scouted this version. Roland Dorrien was not the man to be afraid of anyone—rightly or wrongly—not he. Besides, Lizzie had no more to do with the concern than they, the speakers, had. It was

Olive Ingelow who was the real apple of discord. Couldn't anyone see that the two were never apart, that the young Squire spent most of his evenings at the Rectory, and how he and the young lady wandered about the lanes together, or sat on the beach all day long?—and now, it turned out that they had been privately married, and that the General had sworn he would never recognise it or set eyes on his son again.

This rumour, once let loose, ranged at will, and these and a dozen other stories, each more preposterous than its predecessor, were circulated throughout Wandsborough, and all the region round about, and gained more or less of ready credence. Among those by whom they were accepted, opinions were divided anent the respective conduct of the General and his son in connection with the affair. Some held that the former was a domestic tyrant of the very worst order, and that the latter had, at last, justifiably rebelled—others again extolled the General as a model parent and a high-principled Christian man, while poor Roland, it was declared, had always been a depraved reprobate and an irreclaimable scamp; in short—and whatever had happened now, he had been rightly served. Then there were not wanting a few who held that between the two it was six of one and half a dozen of the other—that the Dorriens were at best an ill-conditioned, quarrelsome lot, and the less one had to do with them the better.

At Ardleigh Court the tidings of the Dorrien quarrel were received with surprise and dismay. The Colonel warmly espoused the cause of the absent, wherein his wife differed with him wholly. Young men were so intolerably self-opinionated now-a-days, she declared, that no doubt General Dorrien had not been unjustified in what he did. However, having so far vindicated her principles of contradictiousness, she was fain to admit that Roland seemed far more sensible than most young men of his age, and she liked what she had seen of him. Whatever Clara may have thought, she said very little, though on one or two occasions she had stood up—rather warmly for her—for the exile; and Maud, albeit she had wrangled a good deal with him during his stay there, was really sorry for him, though being of a romantic turn she was inclined to feel

very angry with him on her sister's account, her lively imagination having long since settled all that.

"A pack of infernal lies!" cried the Colonel with heat, referring to some of the reports which had come to his ears concerning the absent. "Pooh! I don't believe a word of them. Dorrien's a quick-tempered fellow—always was, by Jove! and Roland's a chip of the old block. I suppose they lost their tempers with each other, and came to high words. As for all that slander, and bringing girls' names into the concern, why, it's scandalous."

"Well, where there's smoke there must be some fire," suggested his wife, with characteristic originality.

"Fire be d——, ahem! I beg your pardon," exploded the good-hearted Colonel. "And I tell you what it is. That libellous old Jezebel—what's her name?—Frewen, for instance, will find herself in Court if she doesn't look out. Libel's a criminal offence, and if she comes before us, I'll commit her for trial—I will, by Jove, as sure as I'm Chairman of Petty Sessions!"

"I think you're rather hard on her," objected Mrs. Neville, true to her colours. "She didn't originate these stories, remember."

"It's my belief she did!" retorted the Colonel. "She hates the Ingelows, and would move heaven and earth to injure them—spiteful, canting old harridan. I think Ingelow mistaken, and his vestments and candles and popish fal-lal great bosh—but hang it! he's a thoroughly good fellow in private life, and I'm not going to stand by and see him worried and his girls' characters taken away by that slanderous old Gamp, who probably began life in a chandler's shop—and I'll let him know that I'm not. I'll call on him this very afternoon, by George, I will!"

At Cranston, as may be supposed, cheerful times did not prevail. Always gloomy and constrained, the gloom and constraint deepened tenfold in the days following upon the rupture. The General's ill-humour was now chronic, and when he did speak it was usually to make some incisive remark calculated to render everyone thoroughly ill at ease. Mrs. Dorrien was freezingly acid, and the household saw no one and went nowhere, and, needless to say, all reference to the erring one was strictly taboo. Hubert

heartily wished the Vac. would be quick and come to an end, and being considerably bored, and proportionately irritable, his sister had to bear the brunt of his—among other—ill-tempers. As for poor Nellie, she felt the separation terribly. She had little thought that morning that she had seen the last of Roland, without even saying good-bye, too. And now she was forbidden even to write to him. Life was very hard—would better times ever come?

CHAPTER XXIII.

DORRIEN OF—NOWHERE.

A PAIR of dingy rooms in a dingy London street, communicating with each other by means of a folding door, which is at present shut. A table, decidedly unsteady on its pins and bedight in a chequered breakfast cloth, whereon is a war-worn tea-pot—which article, by the way, knives and forks, dish-covers and spoons seem to have been made specially to match—cloudy delf, cruets not guiltless of defunct flies, an uninviting loaf and a pat of—butterine or oleo-margarine, or whatever is the London lodging-house equivalent for butter, and, perchance, when that cover is lifted, a brace of leathery fried eggs, undoubtedly not of to-day's or yesterday's origin, will be disclosed to view. And this appetising repast, and this glaringly-vulgar and soul-depressing abode must soon be exchanged for something more nauseous, for something more vulgar and soul-depressing still, for even this is somewhat beyond Roland's means—beyond the miserable pittance he has managed to save from the wreck. There had been an accumulation of interest on the capital in the fallen Bank, which in a fortunate moment, somewhat earlier, he had been induced to invest in a small speculation, and this, together with a little which still remained out of his last year's dividend, just availed to save him from immediate destitution.

He enters, and listlessly draws a chair to the table. There is a smell of escaped gas in the room, which, mingling with a vaporous whiff from the kitchen of unmistakable cabbage in process of boiling, nearly upsets him. Quickly he throws open the window, admitting a rush of air from the dark, misty street, that makes him shiver; but anything is better than the abominable atmosphere of the house, and again he draws his chair in and attempts to breakfast—attempts. Even Roy, who comes in for most

of his master's share, and who has an especial weakness for bread and butter, feeds with a lack of enthusiasm which shows that he, too, is not unaffected by the change of circumstances. And why not he as well as his master? Here, no scamper over breezy downs, no life in the strong, pure air of the salt sea, no sunshine and green fields, and at other times no snug, cheerful rooms, where he may make himself thoroughly at home. His walks are taken in gloomy streets, where he is continually jostled and trodden on—his beautiful coat would seem to have been given him expressly for the purpose of collecting pailsful of metropolitan mud, and he himself is treated as the natural enemy of mankind. Sticks and stones are slily hurled at him from alleys and doorways; twice has a desperate attempt been made to steal him, only failing the second time by great good luck, the fastening of the muzzle into which his nose had been deftly betrayed, having given way, and he, taking prompt advantage of the casualty, had nearly bitten off three of the enemy's fingers, and made good his retreat. Park-keepers eye him with no benevolent glance when he indulges in a scamper in those elysian fields of public recreation, and, even there, other dogs resent his intrusion, and would carry out the canine equivalent for "'eaving 'arf a brick" far more than they do, were it not that Master Roy, good-tempered as he naturally is, can make great and effective play with his eye-teeth when roused—as more than one quarrelsome bull-terrier or black retriever could testify in pain and sorrow for a fortnight after.

Roland Dorrien's reflections as he sits in this dismal hole, trying to imagine that he is breakfasting, are of the very gloomiest. More than a month has gone by since he learned the worst, and as yet he is without plans for the future. Of his own free will and by his own act he has cut himself adrift from all who might have befriended him in his extremity. No, rather he prefers to sink or swim—probably the former—alone. A few days after we last saw him, Venn received a few lines notifying that he thought it better under the circumstances to take himself out of everybody's way for a time—most likely he should go abroad, but anyhow, had settled nothing; and Venn, on

receipt thereof, had repaired post haste to his friend's lodgings, only to find he had kept his word. He had disappeared, literally, leaving no trace. And the good-hearted stock-broker had been sorely apprehensive. Men had been known to do queer things with far less excuse than Dorrien might show, and his pulse would beat quicker more than once when he came upon newspaper reports of any of those ghastly "finds" only too common in the metropolis. And Dr. Ingelow, too, who had run up to Town for the purpose, had enquired so anxiously, and seemed so distressed, that he, Venn, could give him absolutely no tidings. Dorrien was a queer fellow, to go and cut all his friends in that way, but then, he was always given to making the worst of things; however, it was to be hoped that some day he would turn up again, and things might come right; and so honest Venn, if he did not altogether dismiss the matter from his thoughts, soon brought himself to regard it with no great anxiety, and plied his daily avocations as if nothing had happened. "Every man for himself" is the world's motto—and *væ victis!*

And now, within a few streets of him—yet as completely hidden as if on a solitary rock in the Northern Hebrides—Roland sits, engaged in his usual occupation—brooding. What is there left that makes this wretched life worth dragging on any longer? Why should he not end it? Even if he will prolong it, he must toil hard at some uncongenial drudgery till the end of his days—harder than the broad-arrow-wearing wretch, wheeling his barrow in the quarries of Portland. He must sink into a mere machine, —lose sight of the fact that he had ever known better things, as completely as if it had been a dream. He must be prepared to place himself at the beck and call of others —of low, repellant cads, it might be—in order to earn a scanty wage, to put up with the bumptiousness, the insolence of some snob in authority, and be thankful for the privilege of existing. No—never! Better perpetual sleep—oblivion—annihilation. Then he would laugh bitterly to himself. Why, even such a mill-horse lot was barred to him. He was quite useless. His neglected, pitch-and-toss kind of "dragging-up" had been such as to

fit him for nothing, and here, in the fierce competition for the morsels that enabled men just to keep body and soul together, where would he be? Nowhere. He was not of the material to hold his own amongst the raving, hungry crowd competing for a starvation pittance. At times a plan would suggest itself as his thoughts turned towards the Western wilds, where five years of his life had been spent. There, at any rate, he might be free. There life might be just worth living. He was fond of shooting—might he not adopt the life of a professional hunter, supporting himself by the proceeds of his rifle? The rolling plains and the vast silent forests, the serrated ridges of the distant sierras crowned with their dazzling snowcaps, the blue sky and the free air of heaven—surely this would be a good exchange for the gloom and filth and indescribable desolation of the great, murky city! Twice he had been on the point of sailing, and both times he had thought better of it—or worse—at the last moment, and had stayed. An insane, yet overmastering, impulse made him cling to the land which contained his heart's shrine, and, although utterly without hope, yet he could not bring himself to place the ocean between them—not yet.

And now this morning the dingy room, with its glaring, vulgar adornments (!), fades from his gaze, as in imagination he is back at Wandsborough. Every one of those hours, too lightly valued at the time, he has mentally gone through again and again. Every tone of a certain voice—every expression of a certain very sweet and bewitching face, from the moment he first espied that latter in Wandsborough Church, is present in his memory now as vividly as though he were actually living through the bygone time all over again.

"Please, sir, Missus says can I clear away?"

The whole picture fades as suddenly as did its reality a few weeks ago, as in a rich cockney twang the unkempt, down-at-heel slavey prefers the above request.

He moves to the window. The outlook is about as inspiriting as that of a London by-street usually is. A barrel organ, grinding out a popular melody, as though it were a dirge, heaves in sight and sound; and a gang of woful and decrepid bipeds from a neighbouring Union is discharging

its burden upon the ratepayers by shovelling the mud and slush from the middle of the street in mechanical and dejected fashion. He glances at the clock, but there is relief rather than consternation in his mind as he awakens to the lateness of the hour—relief, that he should already have got through so much of the morning. How many mornings were to be got through on this side of—what?

"Come, Roy. Out!"

The dog jumps up and works himself into something like his usual state of excitement attendant upon the welcome summons, and they sally forth. The street is one of those in the vicinity of Hyde Park, and thither they turn their steps. At any rate it is open—and away tears Roy, trying perhaps to imagine himself on the turfy slopes about Minchkil Beacon as he scampers over the grass, scattering the few sooty disconsolate sheep right and left. Entering near the Marble Arch, Roland walks straight across, nor pauses till the bridge on the Serpentine is reached. It is a dull grey day, and the air is steely and cold. He stands on the bridge, lazily trying to imagine that he is gazing upon a broad river with its green sloping banks shaded by feathery elms, away in the heart of the sweet, peaceful country. The leaves have hardly begun to fall, and save for the muffled din of traffic, there is little to betoken the proximity of a mighty city. Then he wanders on, and eventually reaches the Round Pond.

"That's a fine dog of yours, sir."

Quickly he looks up at the speaker, a man of about his own age, and who wears the appearance of most well-to-do English gentlemen with nothing remarkable about them, and assents. Then the other, who is evidently of a communicative disposition, launches out into a dissertation upon dogs in general and dogs in London in particular, and the drawbacks attendant upon their comfort and well-being in the metropolis; and Roland, nothing loth, finds himself conversing with something like zest. It is long since he has exchanged an idea with anybody, and now he finds a certain amount of diversion in this stranger's talk. Roy, too, seems to take to him, for he wags his tail and suffers himself to be patted in a way that is remarkable; for of late, like his master, though with different

reasons, he has taken to viewing all mankind with suspicion.

"And so he comes from America, does he?" says the stranger again. "Do you know, I haven't seen a dog I fancied so for a long time, and I've often seen you and him here before to-day. Now, I hope it's no offence—and, if it is, I really beg pardon—but you wouldn't feel disposed to part with him, I suppose?"

Part with him! Part with Roy—dear, true-hearted Roy, his second self, the one faithful friend who shared his exile. The idea seemed to sting him like a lash! Yet, why should it? He need only answer in the negative, and there was no harm done. But the question had seemed to come significantly at this moment, for of late he had been haunted by a growing conviction that the time for such a parting was not far distant.

"Oh, no offence, of course," he replied quietly, but there is a troubled look in his eyes which the other sees and makes a mental note of. "But I don't want to part with him."

"Of course. I can quite understand your not relishing the question," says the stranger good-humouredly. "I hate to be asked to sell a favourite dog myself. But—at the risk of being importunate—if ever you should want to sell him, would you mind giving me the first offer? You shall name your own price. Fact is, I've taken an extraordinary fancy to him. Here's an address that'll always find me."

Under the circumstances Roland thinks there is no harm in accepting the card which the other tenders him, and which bears an address in Kensington, and the name of his new acquaintance, he learns through the same agency, is Frank Marsland. But he does not feel bound to reciprocate the confidence, and after a little more conversation they part: Roland, to dismiss the matter completely from his mind, as he makes his way back to his rooms, and the stranger to wonder who the deuce that good-looking fellow can be who seems to haunt the Round Pond with that splendid dog, and who always looks, by Jove! as if he had committed a murder or was about to commit one.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A TRESPASSER.

"NELLIE," said Hubert Dorrien to his sister, as he was hurrying through an early breakfast on the morning of his departure for Oxford, "do you ever hear from Roland?"

"No—why?" said the girl, with a startled glance around.

"Because—well, do you know anything about the state of his affairs? I mean, had he any interest in this Tynnestop Bank? I've a sort of hazy idea he had, don't you see?"

Nellie turned very pale.

"Is—is there anything wrong with it?"

"By jingo!" replied Hubert with a whistle and stare of surprise. "Ra—ther! Why, it went up the gum—bang—smash. Heaps of fellows ruined—one that I know. But that was more than a month ago. Surely you had heard."

"Never—until this moment. Hubert, I wonder if papa knows. Why, every shilling Roland had was invested in it."

"No!"

"It was, though. Oh Hubert, and now he may be—starving perhaps!" cried the girl, choking down a sob. "What is to be done? We don't even know where he is?"

"By Jove!" muttered Hubert gloomily. "If the veteran knew he might arrange something, eh? It's hard luck on a fellow to be suddenly cleaned out."

He was thinking of that cheque which his brother had sent him on the very day of his ruin. Comparing notes, Hubert now saw that Roland must have heard the fatal news immediately after—probably the same day—yet he had made no attempt to back out of his promise. Hubert Dorrien was by nature bad all round, shallow, intensely

selfish and thoroughly mean; yet even he felt uncomfortable as he thought of how sorely his brother might be in need of that very sum he had so generously lent—if not given—him. And yet to-day he was no more in a position to repay it than he had been at the time to satisfy the demand to meet which it was borrowed. But he strove to quiet his conscience. He would repay it some day; besides, now it was impossible, for no one knew where the deuce Roland was to be found—in fact, it was his own fault for hiding himself away from everybody. Yes—that would do. It was Roland's own fault. And conscience slumbered anon.

But all further discussion of the wanderer's affairs was arrested by the entrance of their parents, and immediately the dog-cart drove round to the door to take Hubert to the station. A cold hand-shake from his father, and many final injunctions from his mother about avoiding draughts, sitting back to the engine, &c., all of which were somewhat impatiently received, and Master Hubert was bowling away at the rate of ten miles per hour towards Wandsborough Road Station, whence his brother had departed some weeks earlier, bearing with him a crushing load of heart-break and unexpected ruin. But no thought of this crossed the mind of this amiable youth, as he lounged back in a first-class smoking compartment, puffing at a choice Cabaña. If he thought of his unfortunate brother at all, it was only with an uneasy fear lest he should ever be reinstated at Cranston, which would make all the difference in the world to his—Hubert's—prospects.

Poor Nellie was in a grievous state of woe, and yet she must stifle her feelings. More than once in the course of breakfast the General coldly asked her if she was unwell, and her mother, guessing her grief was not on account of the brother who had just driven away from the door, and resenting the fact, made one or two amiable comments thereon in her most withering of tones. But at last the dismal meal came to an end, and she was free to wander away and indulge her grief when and where she chose.

Assuredly she had known nothing of this last blow which had fallen upon her unhappy brother—until this morning. She knew of the awful quarrel between him and their

father, of course, and she guessed that Olive Ingelow was the subject of dispute—but this last stroke of Fate she had never even dreamt of. Roland was apt to be close about his private affairs, and it was only by the merest chance he had mentioned to her that he intended some day to withdraw from the ill-fated investment, and that, just before the crash. Probably her father knew, but beyond themselves no one in the neighbourhood would have any idea that the rather sensational financial crash could affect her or hers, and as she seldom took up a newspaper the knowledge of it had escaped her.

She threw a wrap around her and strolled out of doors. How desolate the ornamental water looked on this chill, grey, autumn morning! The swans greeted her approach with a resentful croak, and floated ill-humouredly away to a reed-sheltered corner. The boats, drawn up high and dry within their shed, looked forlorn and neglected, and the rustic bench where she and the absent brother had lounged away many a sunny hour of sultry morning or drowsy afternoon, was bestrewn with damp, fallen leaves. All the surroundings combined to strike a cold and desolate chill to poor Nellie's heart. If only that brother were back again. She might have made much more of him, and now it was too late. The result of this dreadful quarrel was a foregone issue. Neither would ever relent, of that there could be not the smallest doubt. She sank down upon the rustic seat, and, secure in this secluded spot from all intrusion, gave way to her grief.

But it happened that not so far from this spot, though concealed from it by a thick belt of shrubbery, ran a public road. It further happened, that on this particular morning, the figure of a tall pedestrian, a gun under his arm, might have been descried upon this road, clearly bent on reaching the arena of slaughter, wherever it was, at the rate of four and a half miles an hour. He was whistling, too, with all the light-heartedness of a healthy, energetic undergraduate, with whom Black Care has never yet shaken hands. Suddenly this pedestrian stopped short, and stood listening intently. A sound as of low sobbing—there could be no mistake about it.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Eustace to himself, transfixed

with amazement. "Now what the deuce can this mean? Here goes, anyhow, for clearing it up!"

He vaulted over the low paling, advanced a step, and then stood irresolute. It occurred to him that he might be —probably was—intruding, and whatever was the matter it could not possibly be any business of his. It was a woman's voice, too, and somehow it struck him as that of a refined and educated one—in fact, a lady. Though not naturally shy, the Oxonian yet hesitated. He was quick to realise that his intrusion might prove unwelcome to the last degree. Again he paused, but now the distressed one, catching sight of him through the rapidly-thinning foliage, started up in alarm. The knot of the difficulty was cut.

"Miss Dorrien, pray pardon my intrusion," he began flurriedly. "The fact is I—I heard—er—I—I'm awfully grieved that anything should have happened to distress you. Do believe that!"

His tones, though stammering, were very feeling. His handsome face was thoroughly earnest and in his eyes was a tender sympathetic light. The first shock of his unexpected appearance over, Nellie experienced a feeling of satisfaction in his presence.

"You are very kind, Mr. Ingelow; but really it is nothing," she answered confusedly. "But—No, it is nothing."

"Won't you give me a great pleasure, Miss Dorrien—the possibility of being able to help you, or, if not that, of being able to sympathise?" pleaded Eustace, all his former shyness put to flight. What a sweet girl Nellie Dorrien was! he thought; indeed, it may as well be confessed that he had thought about her a good deal since their meeting at Bankside, and also that the chaff with which his sisters had plied him on the subject, had partaken far more of the nature of the "true word spoken in jest" than he allowed to appear. And now to find her again, like this! What susceptible heart aged twenty-two could resist such an appeal as beauty in distress, especially when strongly predisposed in favour of said beauty?

And Nellie? She had met the rector's son but once since that festive gathering, and then only for a few

minutes in a room full of people. But she had greatly liked him, and her interest in him had not been decreased by the cutting, virulent remarks in which her father was wont to indulge from time to time when reminded of the obnoxious youth's existence. And now, as he suddenly appeared before her in grief, looking so strong and brave and handsome, and withal so gentle and sympathetic, she felt quite soothed by his presence.

"Mr. Ingelow, I am in great distress about Roland," she answered, looking up. "I've only just heard of—of that last cruel blow, which happened to him." (A sob.) "He is ruined—he may be starving now—and we don't even know where he is. It is cruel to think of. And no one but myself cares a straw whether he is alive or dead," she added bitterly.

"Don't say that, Miss Dorrien," said Eustace gently, his heart somewhere in the region of his throat. "Indeed you are mistaken. We all liked him so much. In fact, my father went up to London to see if—if—we could be of any use to him, although Venn wrote to say it was quite useless, as Dorrien seemed to have made up his mind to cut himself adrift from everybody—in fact, had disappeared, and that it was impossible to trace him. And it was. But don't be downhearted. We are sure to hear from him soon."

"Your father did this?" said Nellie. "How good he is!"

"He is all that—the dear old 'padre.' I don't mean on this account," explained Eustace. "But he liked your brother very much, as, in fact, we all did."

Listening to, and sympathising with, Nellie's trouble, Eustace blessed the luck which had brought him that way this morning. She looked so pretty and engaging as, the first feeling of shyness over, she talked to him as freely as if she had known him all her life. And time went by so quickly that somehow or other he clean forgot about the tempting day's rabbit-shooting which awaited him at the goal whither his steps had been tending, and where two other ardent sportsmen were heartily anathematising "that lazy beggar, Ingelow, who seemed to think it was all the same, by George! if they didn't begin to put in the

ferrets till the afternoon." Forgot everything, except that a sweetly pretty girl, with the most delicious blue eyes and brown wavy hair, was pouring her grief into his sympathising ear, and that he was pledging himself again and again to move heaven and earth to find the object of that grief.

Suddenly a sound of approaching footsteps, Nellie looked up, and turned as white as a sheet.

"Go—go!" she cried. "Quick! It's papa."

"Whoever it is it's too late to go, for he'll have seen me," replied Eustace quietly, but fearlessly. "But keep perfectly cool, and don't show any sign of alarm. It isn't your father."

Nor was it. It was, however, a personage who might, though vicariously, prove not much less formidable.

"Good morning, sir. But it'll be raining presently, a'm thinking!" said Johnston, the head gardener, as he walked by the pair. And although his tone was civil, even good-natured, Eustace was not slow to mark a look of exultant malice in the Scot's cunning features. His turn had come now.

"Oh, Mr. Ingelow!" cried Nellie aghast, when the man had gone by. "What if Johnston were to let out to papa, that—that he had—seen you here?"

"But he won't. Why should he?" said Eustace gaily. "No fear of that, I should think. And what a trespasser I am—here, with a gun." All the same he was very uneasy in his own mind, remembering the fellow's parting shot in the Rectory garden.

"I think I had better go in," said Nellie, who was really frightened. "Good-bye, Mr. Ingelow. Thank you very, very much for your kindness to-day. And you will let me know when you hear anything of poor Roland."

"Indeed, I will," answered the young man earnestly, taking both her hands in his, and pressing them very tightly. "And—Nellie—I shall not see you again till Christmas. I am going back to Oxford to-morrow. But you will let me see you then in spite of that awful parent of yours. Good-bye—my darling!"

It slipped out. A start. A tell-tale, blushing face—then—a kiss. But the colour faded from the girl's cheek, which grew white again.

"Hark! Someone is coming. Please go—Eustace—and—good-bye."

She was really alarmed, and it would be cruel of him to stay a moment longer. But his heart was light within him. She had called him "Eustace," and had spoken affectionately to him. A hasty, murmured word, and he was gone.

And as Eustace Ingelow regained the high road, it seemed that five years had been added to his life since he leaped that low paling into Cranston Park, barely an hour before. He had gone in there a light-hearted, thoughtless boy—he returned a man, with a new purpose to engross his life.

That evening the rector received a note. He could not repress a start as his eye fell upon the Dorrien crest and legend stamped on the flap of the envelope. Had the wanderer decided to return to them at last? A second glance, however, showed that the letter was not a postal missive, but had been delivered by hand. Breaking it open, this is what he read:

"General Dorrien present his compliments to the Rector of Wandsborough and Mr. Eustace Ingelow, and begs to remind the latter gentleman that no portion of Cranston Park is, in any sense, public property, and also to draw his attention to more than one notice-board there placed, which affects the question of trespass.

"General Dorrien takes the further liberty of remarking that *gentlemen*, having occasion to communicate with young ladies living under the care of their parents, would, in his opinion, be acting more honourably by obtaining lawful sanction prior to such communication, rather than by meeting clandestinely in secluded corners of the said parents' private grounds.

"Cranston Hall.

"Thursday."

A flush of anger came over the rector's face as he read this precious missive, which, though the sender had bare

legal right on his side, was clearly intended as a studied insult. Then he dropped it, as if it were something loathsome, and quietly busied himself again with the work which he had in hand. But when the girls had gone to bed he called his son into his study.

"Eustace, turn in here and smoke your pipe. It's warmer than in that belittered den of yours upstairs."

"All right, dad. I'll just run up and put on a 'blazer.'"

"—There," as he returned in the oldest and most comfortable of loose jackets. "Now, dad, we'll be able to have our last smoke for a couple of months or so, in snugness and quietude," he added, laying a hand affectionately on his father's arm, as he slipped past him, and made for his favourite easy chair.

The rector wheeled back his chair, and glanced with fond, trusting pride at his bright, strong, handsome son.

"Read that, Eustace," he said, with a slight sigh. "And now, my boy, tell me all about it."

The young man's face reddened as he took in the contents of the note, and he let fall one or two expressions highly uncomplimentary to the Squire of Cranston. Then he obeyed his father's request to the very letter.

The rector listened with clouded brow. There seemed to be a kind of fatality lying between his house and that of the Dorriens. First Olive, and now Eustace—both, by the way, his favourite children. He foresaw endless trouble in the circumstance. But trouble must be faced and overcome, not shirked—was his creed. If the boy was really in earnest, why, an early attachment of this kind might not be a bad thing for him; the more refining influences at work over a young man's life the better. He knew nothing of Nellie Dorrien, personally, but he had greatly liked her appearance, and as for the opposition of her family, why, Eustace was a man and must fight his own battles. It was different in Olive's case.

"You are sure you are in earnest about this, Eustace?" he said, when the young fellow had finished his recital. "But you are very young yet, my boy, just at the age for receiving impressions, and also for changing them. What if, later, you were to find out you had been hasty, and had come to think differently?"

Needless to say, the answer was conclusive and decided —vehement even. The rector smiled good-naturedly, as he encouraged his son to talk on this congenial topic to his heart's content, while he listened. It had always been his plan to cultivate his children's confidence to the very utmost, and these evening talks over the social weed between father and son, when the latter was at home, were of almost nightly occurrence. It would have been a very strange thing, indeed, that would have impaired the existing confidence between them. Certainly General Dorrien's ill-conditioned missive was powerless to do so.

"I'm afraid you must send him an apology, before you go, Eustace," said the rector. You see, strictly speaking, you were trespassing in his grounds."

"Well, yes. I suppose I must. I'll apologise to the old curmudgeon for being in his park, but for nothing else," answered Eustace stoutly. "And that sneaking rascal, Johnston, he's at the bottom of the mischief. I could see it in his eye. Good-night, dad. Don't let this affair worry you at all, whatever you do."

CHAPTER XXV.

HIS LAST FRIEND.

MIDWINTER in the metropolis!

If you are blessed with a sufficient income, a snug club, a cheerful abode and a good digestion, there is nothing very terrible in the above. But, if your shillings are scanty in number, and each one disbursed with infinite reluctance, if you have been so long in a far country as to be unknown to, or forgotten by, every living soul, if you are condemned to pig it in a miserable slum, because needs must when the devil drives—then, O friend and reader—Heaven help you!

Midwinter in the metropolis!

Streets knee-deep in black, slushy, half-melted snow; a pelting, ceaseless rain falling from the opaque, lowering vapour above, which makes one doubt the existence of Heaven's blue firmament otherwise than in dreams; foot passengers with streaming umbrellas and muffled in vast wraps, jostling each other angrily, as, red-nosed and watery-eyed, they hurry through the rain and mire; then, as the short afternoon fades into night, the yellow light of gas lamps and the glare of shop windows reflects itself slimily on the sloppy pavements, and the breath of the cab and omnibus horses mingles in a steamy cloud with the prevailing dank and fog-laden atmosphere.

On just such a day as this Roland Dorrien sits moodily in his dreary, comfortless room, looking out into the darkling vista of rain and fog. A tiny handful of fire flickers in the grate, hardly enough to make itself felt twelve inches off, and though he is wrapped in a warm, thick overcoat he shivers from time to time. He is looking very altered from when we saw him last, three or four months ago, very pale, and haggard, and hollow-eyed, and a frown is seldom altogether away from his brow; but his

clothes are not shabby, nor does his countenance wear the neglected and unkempt aspect of a man who had come down so irretrievably in the world as to be careless of appearances. His dark curling hair is as neat, but his face is no longer clean-shaven, for he has allowed a thickly-growing beard to hide it, in addition to the heavy, drooping moustache. From a vestiary point of view he would seem as prosperous as in the days when he was known to, and envied by, Wandsborough and its neighbourhood as the future Squire of Cranston. But as a set-off against this, he seldom indulges in more than one full meal a day, sometimes not that. Prevention is better than cure, he thinks, and if the pangs of hunger assail him, why, a crust of bread will stave it off for the time being. As a consequence, his system is rapidly falling to zero, and now he lives in a kind of lethargy which is half a waking slumber. He goes out and comes in, taking not the slightest notice of what transpires around him, and of society or acquaintances he has none. In the intervals between his brooding fits, his pen affords him a solace, and at times he will sit down and by the hour confide his reflections to sympathising paper, strange, weird fancies and reasonings, so startling and *bizarre* in their wildness, that, but for the strong, logical sequence running through them, they might be taken for the ravings of delirium.

As with food, so with other bodily comforts. Firing costs money, of which he has but the scantiest store, wherefore he sits and shivers. Tobacco he has hardly touched since his ruin, for the same reason, and as for anything alcoholic he has almost forgotten what it was like. There is method in his madness, and against this temptation he has set a resolute face. It may be that he will soon find an unknown and nameless grave, probably he will—indeed, this is a contingency he has quite brought himself to contemplate with equanimity, but never will he sink to the level of a raving, drink-sodden beast. Yet another danger, more imminent still, he somehow overlooks. A little more of this morbid, brooding life in its frightful loneliness, and the man will go mad.

But if he himself overlooks the possibility, others do not. He has changed his lodgings no less than three times

in as many months, in reality, obliged to do so by the fears of his respective landladies, who didn't like to "'ave a gentleman in the 'ouse as was that queer—no, not if you was to give them the whole Bank of England. Why, they might be murdered any night in their beds." So one after another politely hinted that they would rather have his room than his occupation, and to each and all poor Roy afforded a ready pretext.

And it is chiefly, in fact wholly, with Roy that his thoughts are concerned, as we once more look in upon him this dark, desolate afternoon. For it has come to this, that any moment, now, he may be called upon to part with this faithful friend, who has been with him in his prosperity, as through no inconsiderable portion of his adversity. Roy is sold.

Yes, sold, and his purchaser is the man who it will be remembered had shown great anxiety to possess him on the occasion of meeting with his master in Kensington Gardens.

And how comes it that his master has brought himself to part with him? The answer is simple. Necessity has no law. Hardly able to keep himself, how shall he be able to keep Roy. The ruined exile foresees the time when he must yield up the struggle which is not worth maintaining: what then is to become of this attached and more than human companion in adversity? And as, in imagination, he sees him the property of some brute or cad, beaten and starved, and spending his days chained to a miserable kennel, he makes up his mind to accept Mr. Marsland's offer. At any rate, Roy will be well-treated by his new master, possibly so well that he may in time come to forget his old one. Never mind, he must go; but it is with a very heavy heart that Roland scribbles off a few lines to the address the other man had given him. He purposely put the price low, he said, as that was only a secondary consideration, the dog's future comfort and well-being was the chief thing. If the other was disposed to agree, the sooner he sent for Roy the better.

A reply soon came. Mr. Marsland was out of town, or would have called himself; as it was he would send for Roy at a stipulated time. He was sorry so little had been

asked, as he himself would have been glad to obtain the dog at a far larger figure. In reality, of course, he understood the state of affairs, but being a good-hearted fellow and a gentleman he divined that the other would rather be left alone, and forebore to press the point.

And so we find the exile sitting here to-day, momentarily expecting the ring at the bell which shall summon him to deliver up his faithful companion. The afternoon wears on. It will soon be dark, and now he hopes that something may occur to delay the sad hour, at any rate until the next morning. Poor Roy sits unsuspectingly, with his head on his master's knee, his soft brown eyes watching his master's moody countenance with a wistful gaze.

Rat-tat, tat-tat-tat! goes the door knocker. Roy, who has become used to persons passing in and out, takes no notice beyond a slight cocking of his ears. A moment more, and the slipshod maid of all work appears, ushering in—

"A gentleman, sir."

With a sigh Roland looks up at the "gentleman," who might be a stableman or an under-keeper, but is a decent-looking, civil fellow enough.

"From Mr. Marsland?"

"Yes, sir. Can I take the dog now, sir?"

"Yes."

He goes into the other room, and returns with a chain and collar. Roy, becoming alive to the import of the situation, backs under the table and whines piteously.

"Come here, Roy—come here, sir," says his master, in a voice that he vainly strives to render firm. "You dear old fellow, you must go, there's no help for it. Come."

The dog obeys, and stands crestfallen, with a world of sad reproach in his soft, pleading eyes, as his master fastens the collar round his white, silky ruff, and kisses him in the middle of his smooth, glossy forehead.

"Now, good-bye, old dog, and don't forget your master too soon," and he gives the chain to the man, who stands waiting.

"Thankee, sir—good evenin', sir. He'll go quiet enough directly, bless him."

They had reached the front door, Roy hanging back and

tugging vigorously at his chain. Roland stands looking after them down the street, in order to see the last of his faithful friend. Suddenly Roy ceases his struggles and trots along quietly for a few steps. Then he stops short. A couple of sudden jerks and he is free. He has slipped his head through the collar and comes running back to his master, and presses against him, looking up into his face with such a piteous whine.

"Good God! There's nothing like piling on the agony," mutters Roland between his set teeth, as he readjusts the collar, drawing the strap tighter, the dog licking his face all the while. "Here—take him away—and—stop, there's half a crown for yourself. And mind you take devilish good care of the dog if you have anything to do with him."

Now, the man was an honest countryman, and, unspoiled by any taint of socialism, he still entertained a hearty respect for his betters, and "a gentleman down on his luck" was in his eyes an object for reverential sympathy. He had taken in the bare, mean vulgarity of the room in which its occupant looked so sadly out of place—and his natural shrewdness told him that the other would not have parted with the dog save under the direst stress of circumstances. So he stammered, and looked nervous, as he tried to refuse the proffered gratuity in a suitable manner.

"Thankee kindly, sir. But master, he don't let none of us take anything from gentlemen, except when they's down for the shootin'," answers the man, hitting upon the only excuse he could invent. "But it's thank ye kindly, sir, all the same, and I'll take downright good care of the dog. Good-evenin', sir."

The now sole occupant of the room feels desolate and lonely indeed. There is Roy's pan of water, and the few crumbs remaining from the dog-biscuits Roy had for his dinner. How silent and intolerable the room feels without him. His last friend!

And now a resolve takes root in his mind, a wild and desperate resolve, and it was partly with this idea that he brought himself to accept a price for Roy. Even now he had better dismiss it, and accept the situation, and hasten on towards oblivion. It is not too late.

Nebuchadnezzar, we read, was transformed into a beast of the field. There comes a time, or times, in most men's lives when they undergo a similar metamorphosis. Such a time had come to Roland Dorrien. He was transformed into—an ass.

Nature, however, was willing to do her best for him, by upsetting, if possible, his wise resolve above referred to. When he tried to rise the following morning, his head was throbbing with an agonising pain, and his consciousness only permitted him to realise one fact—that to move from his bed that day would be a stark impossibility.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TWO MEETINGS.

For three days Roland lay in his shabby lodgings, too ill to stir from his bed; and but for the consciousness that, if he would accomplish his purpose, he must rouse himself, and determine to rally, the probability is that he would never have risen from it at all.

The effort must be made. His vitality, sadly impaired by a long course of semi-starvation, must be restored by the contrary treatment. He was not going to die in any such squalid hole as this, among the dirty and repellant semblances of humanity, who, under the circumstances, grudgingly ministered to his wants. Not he. He would get up; try whether the air would set him on his legs again, and if so, would certainly carry out his plan the very next day. His funds, considerably replenished by the price of parting with his last, faithful friend, would enable him to do this, only it must be done at once, and then—afterwards? Well, he had a plan.

Rising with an effort from his bed, Roland proceeded to dress himself, with infinite difficulty, for he felt wretchedly weak and dazed. Then at the picture which his distorted and cracked mirror presented him with, he fairly started. His beard, which he had allowed to grow at will since his misfortunes, was now plentifully streaked with grey, and with such alarming suddenness had this come about that he stared at his reflected face in amazement. Then he remembered with sardonic bitterness that this circumstance would yet further aid his plans. Who would recognise him now?

It was afternoon when he sallied forth. With a pang he missed his attached companion, and his sense of loneliness seemed enhanced tenfold. The short winter day was already closing in, and a keen north-easter, wafting particles

of sleet from the black and riftless sky, chilled him to the bone. Anything, though, rather than remain longer in the frightful depression of his dingy rooms.

The dark sky and the winter gloom struck him as an earnest of what life was to be henceforth. The pinched and sour expression on the countenance of the British public struggling in the teeth of the biting north-easter, reflected aptly the attitude of the world towards him who is irrevocably down. Nothing was above a certain value—not even life, for may not life itself be held on terms too hard?

His wanderings had brought him to Charing Cross, and walking a little way up the Strand he turned into a well-known tavern to dine. Then it occurred to him that he might as well look out a certain train.

But the A.B.C. time-table, requisite for this purpose, was not among the resources of the establishment.

"Where can I get one, then?" he asked.

"We can send out for one, sir," said the waiter.

"Then do."

Not till an hour had passed was the A.B.C. put into his hands.

"Why the devil have you been so long about it?" he asked, rendered irritable by the fatigue and excitement of the day, as he snatched it in eager haste, and his hands trembled as he turned over the leaves.

"What the devil are you staring at now?" he cried, looking up and meeting the glance of the waiter, who was watching him curiously. The man muttered a word of apology and hastened away.

At length he found the train he wanted, put a mark against it, and turned down the corner of the page. Then he fell into a profound reverie. Suddenly he started up, paid his bill and hurried away.

"Tom," said the waiter who had attended on him, hailing a colleague. "See that cove just gone out?"

"Yes."

"Should you know him again?"

"Swear to him anywhere," was the laconic reply.

"'E's a queer 'un. Look. 'E's left his time-table that he kicked up such a blessed row about gettin'. Wonder

where 'e's a-goin'. Look 'ere, it's turned down and marked."

At that moment Roland had suddenly come to a standstill in the street, and like the proverbial Caledonian, was swearing "at large." For it had dawned upon him that he had forgotten his A.B.C. Should he go back for it? No; too far. He would get another.

But little he dreamed what gigantic importance to his weal or woe that trivial act of forgetfulness would one day assume.

The cold was cutting, and just now a gust of driving sleet swept down upon him, and in contrast he became aware of the glaring portico of a variety theatre just in front. There at any rate he would be warm. Once within, seated, with something to drink in front of him, and smoking a cigar—the first for several long months—he gave himself up to a sheer sense of warmth and physical comfort, which, combined with the effects of the stimulants, produced a state of dreamy placidity. To the performance he paid no attention whatever. Turn after turn was the same, dull, tawdry, idiotic—but each intensely respectable in its vulgar way.

Overcome by the stuffiness of the place, he went out for a little while. On his return the house was in a ferment of excitement. The star performer of the evening had just been on—and off; an athletic exhibition apparently, as the attendants were removing a net and tight rope, among other things; and a popular one, for some belated handclapping was still going on. But for him it had no more interest than had any of the others, nor did the overheard remarks made by those in the neighbourhood—to the effect that they wouldn't have missed it for anything—strike him with any overwhelming sense of loss. Then, as the performance drew to an end, he made his way into the street.

The sleet showers had ceased, the wind had gone down, and the night, clear and fine, was an agreeable contrast to the confined atmosphere and garish interior of the theatre. Roland, threading the hurrying crowds homeward bound from the numerous places of entertainment, felt small inclination to follow their example. He preferred the open

air. Strolling down Whitehall, unaware of a figure in a long ulster following at some little distance behind, he reached Westminster Bridge. It seemed very still and quiet here. The bridge was destitute of passers-by, and the double crescent of lights twinkled like eyes upon the dark waters. The tide was at ebb, and the black current swirled beneath the piers with many a hiss and hollow gurgle, and the solitary watcher felt chained to the spot by a weird and intangible fascination. Just then, with sepulchral boom, "Great Tom" began tolling the hour of midnight.

The pedestrian turned to retrace his steps. As he did so the figure in the ulster stopped suddenly, and faced him. The move had been well timed. Roland gave a great start, and stared in bewildered fashion upon the face confronting him in the full glare of the lamplight, for he was looking into the limpid blue eyes of Lizzie Devine.

"Well!" she said, and there was a flash of white teeth as the full lips parted into a very attractive smile, which broadened into a little laugh at the sudden and cold look of disapproval which had frozen up the expression of the other's face. "That's right, think the worst of me," she went on. "Only, if you do, you happen to be wrong—though it's little enough difference it would make to you, I should suppose, even if you weren't."

"What on earth are you doing up here, Lizzie?" he said, ignoring the "feeler." "Left Cranston for good, eh?"

"Don't know. I left soon after you did, so can't give you all the latest news, I'm afraid."

"There never is any down there, so that's no loss," he said with affected carelessness. But not for a moment did it deceive the other, and a great wave of pitiful tenderness welled up within her heart. She had all the admiration of her class for "gameness," and now, as she noted the ravages which ill-fortune and consequent ill-health had wrought upon the appearance of this man, she needed none to tell her to what depths of poverty he had dropped. Yet he carried it—for her benefit at any rate—with the same careless ease as he had done the enviable circumstances under which they had last met.

"Why did you go out just before my 'turn,' and come back just after?" she said. "Did you know it was me?"

"Your 'turn'?" he repeated mystified. "Very sorry, but I don't quite follow."

"You were in the Abracadabra the whole evening, and the only turn you missed was mine."

He began to see. This, then, was Lizzie's line at present, yet how on earth, under the absurd and Italianised stage-name on the programme, even if it had attracted his attention at all, could he ever have dreamed of looking for Lizzie Devine?

"Why, of course, I had no idea it was you," he said.

"Well, you see, you needn't have looked so black and suspicious at me. I'm a first-rate draw there, I can tell you, and that's worth something a week. And I've got other engagements sticking out that are better still."

"I'm delighted to hear it, Lizzie. And—how well you're looking!"

"That's more than you are," she said quickly, the glow of pride and pleasure evoked by the compliment from his lips giving way to a helpless feeling of compunction and concern as she looked at him, the while in a confused whirl her thoughts were chasing each other round and round. She had heard enough of Cranston gossip to know what had happened between General Dorrien and his eldest son, and now the appearance of the latter, accidentally encountered after all this time, had enabled her shrewdly to fill up the gap. What could she do? If only she could help him. She had gone up in the world materially, and was going up still more—not by reason of her performance, which was only average, but by her rare physical attractiveness—and was commanding large salaries. Yet withal, she had kept straight by reason of the memory of the man talking with her here to-night; but ah! what a wreck he was compared with his former self, and the reason thereof nobody was more capable of appreciating. Yet she knew she was as powerless to help him in the slightest degree as yon ragged tramp "singing" outside the public house over the road just before closing time; and that apart from the certainty that now he only saw her as the

daughter of a flagrantly drunken and disreputable village rowdy.

"Getting late, isn't it?" he said, misinterpreting her silence. "We might drop in somewhere and get a 'split' or something before closing time."

"We'll drop in and get something—yes," she answered decisively, "but nowhere else than in my own place. You're not too proud, are you—remembering old times on the other side? No, you can't be."

He laughed wearily. "I don't know. I'm not much up to conviviality these days. I think I'll go and turn in. Fact is I'm beastly tired."

"Great Scott, but that's a fine girl!" said a voice behind, obviously not intended to be heard by its object or her escort. "Wonder if she'll be as disappointing as to the face."

"They generally are," said another.

There was that in the tone to make Roland Dorrien start. Three young men in evening dress and crush hats overtook and passed them, and simultaneously three heads came round to look at his companion. But one head remained around a moment longer than the others, and it took in not only the face of the girl but that of himself, and in it he beheld once more the face of his brother Hubert. And it needed not the start the latter gave to show that the recognition was not one-sided.

CHAPTER XXVII.

INTERIM.

CHRISTMAS had come and gone, and Eustace Ingelow was at home again, but things were not going well with him, and he was in consequence proportionately gloomy. Never, since the day he surprised her in the midst of her grief, had he had the chance of speaking to Nellie Dorrien alone. Whether by accident or design, she had been invited to visit a relative at a distance for Christmas. She had left Cranston a few days before his arrival, and it seemed unlikely that her return would take place before his departure, and he had failed in his undertaking, for no trace could he discover of her missing brother. Venn had written stating that he feared they would see no more of Roland Dorrien until such time as that worthy chose to disclose his whereabouts. And Eustace's heart had sunk. If Venn, a London man, could not trace his friend, what chance had he himself, who could bring neither time nor experience to bear upon his quest? His failure and misgivings he had made known to Nellie, who had recognized the force of them. Poor Eustace, however, was very unhappy. He had been looking forward to the Christmas vacation with the bright, warm glow of first love fresh at his heart, and with all the sanguine buoyancy of youth. Things would come right somehow. But, now that his hopes were so cruelly disappointed, and that the meetings, all the sweeter if stolen, to which he had been looking forward, were not to be, the poor fellow hardly knew how to conceal his despondency. In Olive he found a ready sympathiser, but hers was a sympathy that was all on one side. Never since the receipt of that last letter from Roland Dorrien had the girl opened her lips on the subject of her griefs to any living soul. It was a strange reticence—yet one that she heroically and rigidly pre-

served, and now, though she entered lovingly into poor Eustace's troubles, of her own she breathed not one word. With such elements of despondency in their midst it was not to be wondered at that Christmas festivities this year had seemed to the rector's family to fall somewhat flat.

At Cranston Hall the chronic atmosphere of gloom and constraint in nowise tended to a clearance, and Time, so far from allaying General Dorrien's resentment towards his eldest son, rather tended to heighten it; as one or two incidents showed. Mr. Curtis, the easy-going but good-hearted vicar of Cranston, happening to be aware of the complete ruin in which the exiled one had been involved through the bank failure, took an opportunity of cautiously approaching this vindictive parent on his behalf, but was met with such an angry rebuff as would have constituted a mortal insult to a less good-natured man, but which the easy-tempered vicar had suffered to pass over him unresented. It was only his duty, he argued to his wife, to try and set things smooth if possible; if not, well, he had done his best. The exile's other advocate was Colonel Neville, who had thought Christmas a capital time for putting in his word, but with like result; and the Colonel falling far short of the parson in the quality of forbearance, something very like a quarrel had taken place between the old friends and companions-in-arms, and a coolness set in between their two houses.

Alone in this uncongenial home poor Nellie had a bad time of it. Her father seldom addressed a word to her, or indeed, to anybody—for as his moroseness increased he would shut himself up in his study for hours or wander about by himself, going nowhere nor entertaining anybody, and since he had discovered the meeting between herself and Eustace Ingelow he had treated her as though very little better than her banished brother. Between herself and her mother there had never been any sympathy, and now there seemed to be less than any. One bright spot was on her horizon—Christmas would come, and she would see Eustace again, and to that she looked forward as to a forlorn hope. And Christmas had come, and previously to it she had been sent away, as we have seen, a procedure which, at any other time and under other cir-

cumstances, would have met with her unbounded approval. But now?

The only one whose spirits were in nowise impaired was Hubert. Why, indeed, should they be, seeing that he was now the assured heir to the broad acres and splendid rent-roll of Cranston? So on the strength of his prospects he found means of launching out into unlimited dissipation. He was now leaving Oxford, and had already mapped out for himself a dazzlingly attractive programme for the enjoyment of "life" when he should take up his abode in London in a week or two to read for his "call." Meanwhile, even in Wandsborough, Master Hubert found scope for some very lively doings, and was only restrained just within the bounds of prudence by the fear of certain of his high jinks reaching the paternal ears, which possibility kept him in a state of periodical and wholesome terror. And there was always the apprehension that circumstances might combine to restore Roland to his rightful place, which would mean nothing less than ruin to himself.

That "no one is all bad" is a favourite cant—but only a cant. In common with not a few others Hubert Dorrien was "all bad"—emphatically so. There was not a single redeeming point in his character, not even the boldness which frequently attends utter want of scruple. The latter quality he possessed in affluent measure, but ever subordinate to the stronger passion of fear. His brother had helped him, very much to his own hindrance, in his dire need, and not only was he dead to all sense of gratitude, but felt only too glad that circumstances afforded him a colourable excuse for neglecting to refund the loan now that he was in a position to do so.

And towards that brother he now felt all the bitter hatred, begotten of fear and a sense of obligation, of which his base and craven nature was capable, and, as fate would have it, the circumstance detailed in a former chapter placed an efficient weapon in his hand. Rumour began to circulate in Wandsborough, and with multifold winks and head-shakings, and "I told you so," and "What else could you expect?" the many-tongued assassin commented on the continued absence of Lizzie Devine. All Wandsborough became aware, or fancied itself so, that the girl was play-

acting, or worse, in London, but that whatever she was doing she was not alone, for had not young Squire Hubert —he had got rapid promotion, you see—met her, in company with his brother, at some theatre or other? That was enough. Everybody knew she was never any better than she should be. A fine girl—yes. A splendidly-handsome girl—yes—but—a bad 'un, come of a bad stock. And those young Dorriens. A wild set, and no mistake! Thus the gossips.

This rumour was quick to reach Gipsy Steve's ears, with the result that the ex-poacher got furiously drunk, and went about vowing vengeance in forcible and blood-curdling terms, thereby narrowly escaping summary dismissal at the hands of Colonel Neville. It was not long, either, in becoming known to Turner, and that reverend person, coupling it with the upshot of his earlier observations, could not refrain from making capital—pious capital of course—out of the knowledge. But circumspectly as he had originated the rumour and disseminated it withal, common consent attributed it to Hubert, and men wondered how his brother could have been such a fool as to trust a fellow who couldn't keep counsel in a delicate affair of this kind, but went blabbing it all over the place. Finally, it became known to the General, as Hubert had all along intended it should. From that moment he felt secure. The heavens might fall, but never again would Roland set foot in his father's presence.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BAN.

"Yes, sir. Our town's bigger nor Wandsbro'—more go-ahead like. It didn't use to be so, you see, but when them works at Wandsbro' were shut up, why, then it fell back and we went ahead, sir."

So spake the loquacious waiter in the coffee-room of the "Silver Fleece Inn," at Battisford, as he skipped, napkin in hand, round the only guest, who was dining early, for it was Sunday. A finely-proportioned man of, apparently, about sixty, and wearing a bushy iron-grey beard and dark-tinted spectacles, it would be difficult to guess at his rank in life. He might be a peer of the realm, or he might be a detective, and he was dressed with perfect simplicity, though well.

"Indeed?" he replied carelessly. "I just remember being at Wandsborough many years ago, when I was almost a boy. By the way, what's that remarkably fine place I passed driving over here? It stood back in a park, where there were any amount of deer."

"Was it against the hill, sir? 'Cos that's Cranston 'All—Gen'ral Dorrien's. Yes, that is a fine place, sir."

"Dorrien did you say? Dorrien? Now that's strange. Fact is, I used to know someone of that name, but I'm certain he hadn't ever been in the army. Has this one any sons?"

"Oh, yes, sir. There's——"

"Ah! The one I knew hadn't. He was a bachelor."

"That must 'ave been the old squire, sir—the Gen'ral's brother. 'E was a bachelor. But this one—well, sir, I don't mind tellin' you, 'e's a terribly cross-tempered gentleman, and they do say as how none of his fam'ly can live with him."

"Indeed? How's that?"

"Well, sir, I believe it's this way," went on the loquacious waiter, delighted at the prospect of whiling away a goodly portion of this dull Sunday afternoon at his favourite pastime. Here, too, was a stranger, one who seemed to listen to him with interest. So he plunged at once into his lecture, with the utter disregard of his class for sequence or order in narration, and the stranger was favoured among other incidents with a highly-coloured version of the fracas which had taken place in the Dorrien family some months earlier.

"And then, you see, sir, the General was that savage with the poor young Squire, 'cos he not only wanted to marry the parson's young lady, but it seemed he hadn't been playing quite on the square with a gal in Cranston village —Steve Devine's gal, that was—he as is now keeper at Colonel Neville's. And now they say he's took up with her in London. She's a play-actress up there, they say.

If the slightest possible change came over the listener's countenance at this announcement, to have discovered it would have taken a very close observer indeed, which the waiter was not.

"H'm! A sort of Don Juan this young Dorrien seems to have been," remarked the stranger more to himself than to the other, and pronouncing the name in the usual British and erroneous way.

"Yessir—I daresay, sir—King John—wasn't 'e the party that 'ad eight wives and cut their 'eads off as fast as he got tired ov them?"

"Well, what sort of a girl was this?"

"A fine gal, sir. A reelly fine, purty gal, and Gipsy Steve, he looked after her orlways and led her a life of it, if any young chap so much as looked at her. And now, sir, 'ere's a bit of queer human natur'," went on the gossip, sinking his voice and looking preternaturally wise. "There's some wot sez they don't believe the gal's with Mr. Roland at all, but that his brother started the story. Ah! he's a bad lot, is young Mr. Hubert."

"Well, but why the deuce should he tell such an infernal lie as that?"

The loquacious one looked at him for a moment pityingly, and his voice grew even more confidential.

"Bless your 'art. Don't you see, sir? The young one wants to stick to all the swag. If the other comes back, well, of course, it'll make all the difference to this one. And so 'e says 'e sor his brother and Lizzie in London together, and the General's more furious than ever about it."

"And what do they think in Wandsborough?"

"Well, sir, there's them as believes it and there's them as doesn't. For my part I dunno wot to think, though, of course, it's no concern o' mine."

"H'm!" The stranger yawned and deliberately stretched himself, and began to show signs of moving, and the loquacious one perceived that his fill of gossip was over for the present.

"Beg pardon, sir," he remarked, "but are you 'Igh Church?"

"What? Why?" answered the stranger, starting from a reverie.

"Because, sir, if you are, there's a big 'Igh Church over at Wandsborough, and lots of folks go from here on a Sunday evening. I've been myself once or twice, but couldn't make nothing out of it. But it's very gorjus."

"Well, it'd be something to do. How long does it take to walk over?"

"Nearly an hour, sir, if you walk very quick. But the walk's jest lovely, and so's the music."

"All right. I may go over. Now I'm going upstairs," and escaping from the running fire of enquiries by which he was pursued, the stranger made his way to his bed-room. Once there, and the door locked, a restless sigh escaped him. He threw open the window, and kept consulting his watch from time to time. Then he sat down and fell into deep thought, with knitted brows and fixed gaze. He was thinking over all he had just heard. The thoughtless chatter of busy-bodies, like this talkative waiter, often reflected public opinion with marvellous accuracy. After a while he rose, and pulling on a warm overcoat and taking a stout walking-stick in his hand, he went out.

About half a mile outside Wandsborough there is a certain stile leading from the high road into the footpath to Minchkil Bay. Anyone commanding a view of this stile

might have witnessed a curious spectacle on this dark, wintry afternoon. They might have descried an elderly stranger, grey-bearded and spectacled, leaning over the stile, his gaze riveted on the cliff path; and our concealed witnesses would opine that the said stranger had one foot in the grave. Then through the gloom rang out a clash of bells upon the damp, chilly atmosphere; a joyous, musical peal, that seemed to tell of light and warmth and peaceful homes. And the lonely man standing there, with his eyes wandering over the darkening wold, heard it, and his face wore an expression such as might rest upon the countenances of the lost. Yes, he seemed dreadfully ill, hardly able to stand, in fact; for presently he sank down into the rimy grass in a half-faint.

For long he sat thus. Then, suddenly starting to his feet, he walked rapidly towards the town, and in a few minutes stood within the church porch. The change from darkness to the brilliantly-lighted interior was bewildering. Mechanically he slipped into the place shown him by the civil verger, heedless of the screwed-round heads and curious glances inseparable from the event. How familiar it all seemed! The stately altar lighted by its six tall tapers; the rows of white-clad choristers, and the celebrant in his rich cope; the solemn chanting and the fragrant fumes of the incense—what memories it seemed to bring back! And around him many a familiar face—yet none knew him.

Mechanically again he took the hymn-book which the good-natured verger put into his hands, and—held it upside down. After the singing, a priest in surplice and stole entered the pulpit and began his sermon, evoking in the stranger's face a momentary gleam of recognition. But his thoughts soon wandered. Our friend Turner, indeed, was a pulpit bore of the first water, but had he been a very Chrysostom he would have met with scant attention from this stranger, who had walked all the way from Battisford to attend the evening service.

The function over, the stranger hastened not to depart, but lingered, half-concealed, in the shadow of a pillar, apparently intent on studying the framed list of notices there hung up—in reality, his keen eyes narrowly scanned

the dispersing congregation. One group stood chatting in a low voice just inside the west door, and, as his eye fell upon it, again that white, haggard look came into his face.

"Brown," said a low, sweet, woman's voice, addressing the verger, who was intent on putting out the lights. "Please tell Mr. Mason that I shall be happy to take his organ duties to-morrow, and even the next day, if he wishes it. So that'll be a weight off his mind."

"Very good, Miss Olive. I know he'll be glad. I'll be sure to tell him. Good-night, ladies."

Then the unknown, with a nod and a "good-evening" to the friendly verger, passed out into the street, keeping within a dozen yards behind the first speaker. Immediately a dark figure passed him hurriedly, and gaining the side of her whom he was watching, a cordial greeting ensued, and the two dropped a little behind the rest. The cassock and cloak which he wore denoted one of the parish clergy, and as he passed under the light of a lamp, the watcher recognised the features of Turner, the curate.

An overpowering desire came over the stranger to learn the burden of their conversation. That a strong bond of mutual sympathy existed between them he had no difficulty in perceiving, and his mind leaped to its own conclusions. Then with noiseless step he overtook the pair and passed them slowly.

But what the sad, soft voice was saying, as well as the answer, was inaudible to the listener. A loud, harsh hammering was sounding in his brain, and he felt faint and dizzy. Fearful of betraying himself, he crossed the road, and leaned against the wall for a few moments to recover. When he looked up again the street was empty.

He wandered out of the town, and still lost in his reflections, hardly noticed where he was till he reached the stile where he had rested a short while previously. Then, instead of continuing his way along the high road, he turned off across the fields, and began to ascend the bleak heights which lay above the cliffs.

And it was a weird and desolate scene, that winter expanse of sea and land upon which the wanderer's glance was bent. On all sides to seaward the mist-wrack was rolling back like a curtain, and a red half-moon slowly rose

in the heavens, pouring a pale, spectral light upon the silent waters and the great mysterious cliffs. A murmur of waves breaking on the beach was upborne to his ears, as he strode rapidly on through the rimy heather plants and the chill, bracing whiff of the salt sea. Minchkil Beacon is left behind, and the rugged brow overhanging Hadden's Slide, and still he keeps on his way, stopping now and again to gaze upon the solemn grandeur of the moonlit coastline.

It is cold, but the pedestrian is in a glow of warmth after his hard, uphill exercise, for he pauses occasionally to rest and wipe his heated brow. What then makes him start and shiver violently, as though chilled to the very marrow?

Cleaving the still and frosty air comes a deep-toned, lugubrious howl, long drawn, and proceeding apparently from the sea itself—a dismal, unearthly baying, not loud, but with a carrying vibration that renders the sound no less felt than heard. The listener standing alone on the cliff feels an icy perspiration break out upon his forehead, and his dilated gaze is riveted upon two rock pinnacles rising out of the sea beneath. The crest of the highest is hidden in a dark cloud.

Stay! A strange phenomenon, that! There is not a vestige of cloud nearer than the horizon. Yet down yonder a dark wreath broods over the summit of one of those rock-turrets. And the highest of The Skegs is far below the brow of the cliff.

The contour of the coast is perfectly outlined in the clear and searching moonlight. The silver surface of the sea is deserted. But darker than ever, and seeming to take shape beneath the watcher's gaze, the cloud rests upon that turret-rock, and from its black folds again and again sounds forth upon the silent night the terrible Death Portent.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE TRAGEDY OF A WINTER NIGHT.

"Pooh! What a fool I am, and what fancies a course of starvation and mooning will put into a man's head!" exclaimed the stranger impatiently. "A wreath of mist over the sea, and immediately one conjures up an apparition. But I never saw anything more diabolically real in my life."

Yet he was not quite reassured as he turned to continue his walk. The cloud had completely disappeared from The Skegs, vanished as suddenly as it had gathered there, nor was there a trace of vapour round the turret-like head—and the moonlight seemed to fall clearer upon the face of the cliffs.

He felt weary. He threw himself on the springy turf, heedless of damp or wet. A great, black fissure yawned at his feet, a gaping rent in the ground seeming to straggle into unknown depths. A few boulders lay about the little hollow where he rested. The fissure in front of him was known to the neighbourhood as Smugglers' Ladder. Bats arose from the dark cleft and circled in the night air. The tide was in, and the lapping of the waves in the chasm beneath came up with a tuneful monotony through this gigantic telephone—but all else was silent as the grave. Far above twinkled the solemn stars, and the red, pointed moon looked angrily down. Then the distant chime from Wandsborough steeple rang out the hour of nine.

Only nine! Yet it might be midnight, so still and lifeless was this out-of-the-world hush. A soothing lethargy crept over him. Stillness—silence—rest. After the warring turmoil of a great city, this was as another world. But it was winter, and soon a shiver from head to foot reminded him that the more prosaic side of life, i.e. bed, had its attractions. A few minutes more and he would be

on his way to Battisford, but a low whistle, unmistakably human, recalled in a trice his wandering reflections. It was repeated, and simultaneously the figure of a man appeared on the skyline.

The stranger did not move. He felt no apprehension, whoever the other might be. He was without hope in this world and therefore absolutely without fear, and so he sat with the lower part of his face resting in his hands, perfectly motionless, while the other approached him, saying in a low whisper:

"Why didn't you answer my signal, dear?"

Then the stranger arose, with a harsh laugh.

"Ha-ha-ha! I'm afraid you're the victim of a trifling 'sell' to-night, Hubert Dorrien."

To say that the new-comer was astonished would be to say next to nothing at all. He was thunderstruck—speechless; and his face was as white as a sheet, as he stood rooted to the earth—gazing at this unexpected apparition as one transfixed.

"G-Good God! Who are you, sir, and what do you want with me?" he stammered at last.

"Ha-ha-ha! Good boy, Hubert. Good boy! Mother's darling and papa's expectant and deserving heir," went on the stranger in the same harsh, jeering tone. "And now, may I ask, who is the fair frail one with whom this most delightful moonlight tryst was to have come off?" Excess of courage was at no time one of Hubert Dorrien's besetting faults, and now he simply shivered, and his lips trembled. All of which the stranger noted as the moonlight played upon the white, terrified face.

"I don't know who the devil you are, sir—and I don't care," he found courage to bluster at last. "But anyhow, I shall wish you good-evening, for I must go," and he made a movement.

"But you are not going, Hubert Dorrien, not yet at least. Not until you and I have had a little talk together," said the stranger, laying a firm hand upon his shoulder.

"Well, what do you want with me?" said Hubert doggedly, but horribly uneasy in his mind, for to his ordinary "prudent" disposition was now added the incubus of a tolerably guilty conscience. The place was

hideously lonely withal, and his strange questioner looked powerful enough to have eaten him.

"Good boy, Hubert—ha-ha-ha! Does papa know you're over here to-night, I wonder? But now—who were you expecting to find here?"

"Be d——d to you!" broke out the young fellow furiously. "I'm not going to stand your impudent catechising. Go to blazes and find out. Oh—by God!"

For the stranger had turned his face full to the light, and, hiding the lower half of it, had removed his glasses.

"—Roland!"

And the two stood looking into each other's eyes in the moonlight, and both faces wore any other expression than that of mutual affection. Yet they were brothers.

"Now that you have stepped into my shoes, Hubert, I hope they fit you," said the elder, drily.

"Oh yes, thanks. Fit—very well indeed. More comfortable, by the bye, after a little further wear," was the reply, given with a cold, exasperating grin.

"Which wear you won't get out of them, my friend, in all probability. So look out for speedy squalls."

"Oh, shan't I?" replied the younger, his former fears dispelled, now that the mysterious stranger's identity lay disclosed. "Shan't I? Who will, then?"

"Why, their rightful owner, of course. Myself, to wit."

"Good dog, Brag," jeered the other contemptuously, jerking a stone across the mouth of Smugglers' Ladder. Better for him had he kept up his prudence a little longer. "And now, Roland, I don't come blundering in on top of your little arrangements up in Town, and should be very glad if you would kindly not interfere with mine here. In other words, by remaining in this sequestered spot you are spoiling my fun—if you have not already done so, that is."

"Ah—now we are coming to it. Just answer me one question. What the deuce made you follow me over half the town one night last week, and then pretend you didn't recognise me?"

"By Jove! It *was* you, then! I wasn't sure, you see, and I couldn't well buttonhole another fellow on spec.

Besides you were with someone," answered Hubert readily. But the other laughed drily.

"Not bad for you, Hubert. Shouldn't wonder if you got your 'silk' after all, one of these days, if you go on as you have begun. And now, isn't it a singular thing that a certain rumour should have started here at my expense, coincidently with that merry meeting of ours just by Westminster Bridge?"

"Very odd," was the sneering rejoinder. "But the world's devilish small, you know, and it's astonishing how these little things will leak out."

He ought to have known better. One glance at his brother's face, and he would have spoken in a very different tone. But he was talking half-turned away.

"Quite so. It is. And now, O brother of mine, may I ask what motive you had in originating such a gratuitously mischievous and infernally backbiting story?"

Hubert's first alarm had given way to exasperation and venomous resentment. Over and above inspiring him with considerable fear, this inconvenient brother of his had quite spoiled his little programme for the evening.

"Go to blazes and find out," he answered again with an impudent sneer. "Or better still—ask Olive Ingelow what she thinks on the subject—Ha-ha-ha!"

But his laughter died, for with a furious curse the other had seized him by the throat. They were perilously near the edge of the chasm to indulge in a wrestling bout. And like a whisper from hell there flashed through the exile's brain a vivid picture of all he had undergone from that sad parting scene in Wandsborough street to this hour, and probably she for whose sake he had given up all and was now an outcast had allowed her mind to be poisoned against him by the lying reports emanating from the slanderous tongue of this ungrateful and heartless young villain, this serpent who was his brother.

"Whisper *her* name again, and I'll choke the life out of you," he ejaculated, almost inarticulate with fury. But Hubert, exasperated beyond measure, forgot all his prudence.

"Yes, I will," he shrieked, wrenching himself free.

"You asked just now who I was expecting to-night. What if it was the lovely Olive herself?"

But again the speaker's voice failed him. Again his face went livid with deadly fear. He recoiled and would fain have fled before the terrible effect of his words. Behind lay the dark, yawning mouth of the chasm. His wild scream for help was choked in his throat. There was a fall—a scuffle and a slide. A human figure rolled down the sloping rock, with fingers convulsively clutching the merciless, unyielding stone, and face upturned to the cold moon in a paroxysm of deadly terror, then disappeared into the black chasm. A metallic sound as of stones dislodged striking against the sides of the fissure, then a dull splash far below and—silence.

He who was left upon the height above stood motionless for some minutes, his chest heaving and a perfect hell of fiendlike ferocity inflaming his countenance. Then he advanced to the edge of the fissure and peered fearlessly down. All was black as ink. Here and there the moonlight from without fell upon an angle of rock far beneath with a ghostly glint, but there was no sign of life—or death; nothing to tell that a human being had just been hurled down that terrific chasm to his last account. No accusing voice in the air—to proclaim aloud over the placid sea, to thunder forth from the hard, frowning cliffs—or even to whisper into the survivor's ear the ghastly tale of this chill winter's night—Murder.

And they two were brothers.

The survivor roused himself and looked keenly around. Were there no traces on the smooth turf that would connect him with the disappearance of the other when he should come to be missed and a search was made; no marks of feet upon the slippery rock? No, there were none. The moon's cold eye alone had witnessed the deed—of which there remained absolutely no trace. Having assured himself of this, he readjusted his spectacles and walked rapidly away from the spot without once looking back.

Battisford was an old-fashioned place and "The Silver Fleece" was a snug and old-fashioned hostelry, where they

kept early hours. Especially on Sundays was this the case, but on this particular Sunday our friend the loquacious waiter was deputed to sit up for the new guest —the gentleman who had gone over to church at Wandsborough. The service there would be over at any time after eight—say half-past, so that he should be back at a quarter past nine or half past at the latest. But it was slow work sitting up alone in the deserted coffee room, and so it speedily came to pass that the talkative one followed the example of the five foolish virgins—slumbered and slept.

At length the stranger returned, and the first sound that greeted his ears as he let himself in and stood within the dimly lighted passage was a prolonged and unmistakable snore. Now in the said passage there stood a clock —a large timepiece of venerable aspect—and the hands of this clock were close upon a quarter-past ten. Whether it was a kind of instinct that prompted him to do so, or that he noticed that the glass was closed, but not shut—or both—cannot be here recorded, but in a moment he had opened the clock face, put the hands back forty minutes, and, having closed the glass again, proceeded carelessly in the direction of the snore.

"Hallo! Been sitting up for me?" he cried. "Early here, I suppose. Well, see if you can scare me up an S. and B., and that's all I shall want to-night."

Up jumped the drowsy one with a start.

"Yes, sir. Beg pardon, sir, but I must ha' dropped off," he said, rubbing his eyes and making for the door. "Ah well, sir, I h'aint been long in a doze; it was after nine when last I looked at this blessed clock, and now it ain't quite half-past yet, leastways it's just over it."

The other felt relieved. There was no fear of the man discovering the alteration of the hands if he had been asleep ever since nine, and it crossed his mind as just within the bounds of possibility that this circumstance might yet stand him in good stead.

"Just over half-past nine? So it is," he said carelessly, as the waiter re-appeared with the brandy and soda. "I must have come quick, for it seemed to me a precious long way from Wandsborough."

"You have come quick, sir. Did you come by the cliffs?"

"The cliffs! Is there a way by the cliffs, then?"

"Oh yes, sir, much shorter. But not over-safe at night, speshully to a gentleman as doesn't know the country well."

"H'm! I should think not. Likely to take a plunge over in the dark—eh? By the way, what's the name of the verger at Wandsborough church? He seems a nice, civil sort of fellow. I rather liked the look of him, and he quite took me under his wing and looked after me. The bald-headed man." This would show that he had been at Wandsborough.

"Brown, sir, it is. Oh yes, I know him well, he's been there a matter o' many years now. He's a downright good honest chap, is Brown," and then the loquacious one launched into a dissertation on the many good qualities and rare virtues of the official in question, which we shall spare the reader, even as he upon whom it was inflicted spared himself by promptly retiring to his room.

Next morning, while the grey-bearded stranger was leisurely discussing a late breakfast, the talkative waiter bustled in.

"Heard the news, sir? but of course you 'aven't—seeing you're only just up."

"Quite right, my friend. And now, what's the excitement?"

"Well, sir, they says as how young Mr. Dorrien, he as we was talking about yesterday, he can't be found nowhere," said the man, hastening to discharge this last prime event with which his mind was burdened. "He went over to Cranston church by himself last night, and didn't come home all night."

"H'm! I don't see anything very extraordinary in that. He may have had reasons of his own for being out all night, perhaps went somewhere by train, eh, don't you see?—young men, you know, will be young men—and missed his train back."

"No, sir, depend upon it there's something wrong,"

dissented the other, provoked at the stranger's imperturbability. He had taken a great liking to him, "a pleasant-spoken, haffable gent as ever was, and yet a gent every hinch of him, as anybody might see" had been his verdict, in camera, with his colleagues below stairs. "Mistress Dorrien they say is that scared, and she's going to have the country searched for him. He's come to grief, 'e has. The carrier from Wandsbro', he as brought the news—he says"—and here the man's voice fell to what he intended to be a most impressive and mysterious whisper—"he says that one of them down at Minchkil Bay was coming home along the beach by moonlight and saw the Dorriens' wraith on 'The Skegs.' The ghost always appears before the death of a Dorrien."

The stranger looked quickly round as a violent shiver ran through him from head to foot.

"Just shut that door, will you? When the front door is open as well, the most infernal draught finds its way in here. It's enough to give a man his death. Thanks. What were you saying? Something about a ghost?"

Only too delighted with the opportunity, our voluble friend proceeded redundantly to regale the stranger's ears with the dour legend we heard narrated by very different lips nearly at the commencement of this narrative. But the listener proved sadly sceptical.

"Pooh!" he said, when the other had done. "That won't wash at all, you know. It's surprising how these humbugging old myths survive in the country, and the further away from Town you get, the more you find of them."

"Beg pardon, sir, but shall you be leaving to-day?" asked the waiter, as the stranger rose from the table.

"No."

"All right, sir. Glad to 'ear it, sir. Custom's slack just now, sir."

CHAPTER XXX.

SEARCH.

GREAT was the consternation which prevailed at Cranston Hall as the day wore on and Hubert did not return.

When first it was reported that his room was undisturbed and his bed had not been slept in, Mrs. Dorrien's chief care was to keep the knowledge from her husband, but soon her fears got the better of her prudence on her son's behalf, and it became necessary to acquaint the General with the fact, with a view to a search being instituted.

Very sternly and concisely the latter at once proceeded to enquire into the circumstances of the case, but, beyond the fact that the missing one had left home with the expressed intention of attending evening service at Cranston Church, no one at the Hall could throw any light on the matter.

"I don't know what could possibly have happened to Hubert between this and the village," he said to his wife. "Why, it's barely twenty minutes' walk. I really don't know what to think about it, Eleanor. It is extremely painful to be obliged to say so, but it looks strangely as if Hubert had started on an unlawful errand, inventing a pretext for covering it. I have not found him invariably truthful, you know."

She burst into a storm of tears, her hard nature stirred to its very depths; her cold heart sorely wounded in its one vulnerable point.

"Oh, my boy, my boy!" she sobbed. "I shall never see you again, something tells me I shall not. And you"—turning fiercely upon her husband—"you were always so stern, so severe with him. He may have left his home, left it for good. Couldn't you remember that he was young, and make allowances—and in delicate health? Yes, it is

you who have driven him away, even as you drove away the other. Oh, my boy, my darling boy! I shall never see him again!"

A deep frown came over the General's brow at this reproach.

"Pray calm yourself, Eleanor," he said sternly. "The reproaches you allow yourself to make are most ill-chosen, and, in fact, inexcusable. However, to confine ourselves strictly to the matter in hand, I shall ride down at once to the village and make enquiries, and, if necessary, shall institute a search without delay."

In less than an hour afterwards the General, aided by Mr. Curtis, the vicar of Cranston, had elicited the following information. His son had been present at the village church the preceding evening, and had left with the congregation. Here testimony began to wax uncertain, some being ready to assert that they noticed Mr. Hubert nearly at the park gates, while others were equally certain they had seen him going in the direction of Wandsborough. From this chaos of testimony it seemed impossible to evolve anything like order, and the General and his willing ally were nearly giving up all attempts at unravelling it, and starting in search of a fresh clue, when light came in upon the subject from an unexpected quarter.

A rustic couple was found who had been "sweethearting" in the lanes outside Cranston, according to the manner of rustic couples, after evening church. These were ready to swear that Mr. Hubert had passed them, walking swiftly, and going in the direction of the cliffs. In fact, they had had the curiosity to turn and watch him. It was a cold, damp evening for any gentleman to be taking a walk on the cliffs all by himself, but why Mr. Hubert should do so rather than return home was a speculation which aroused curiosity even in their thick, rustic pates. The pair, a stolid, bovine brace of bumpkins, were in great awe during the severe cross-questioning they underwent at the hands of the Squire and the Vicar, both magistrates to boot, but stuck tenaciously to the main point of their narrative. They were not mistaken, for not only had they seen Mr. Hubert's face distinctly in the moonlight, but they had wished him "good-night," to which he had replied.

As to time, well, about that they couldn't be quite certain, they supposed it must have been about nine—or, if anything, rather earlier; but anyhow, not long after church.

It was clear that these people were the last who had seen Hubert, and convinced that now they were on the right track, though with a direful sinking of heart, the two gentlemen agreed that their next move must be to betake themselves to Minchkil Bay, and enlist the services of the hardy seafarers there in a regular search. If the missing man had found his way to the cliffs, as both feared he had, he might have fallen over. Possibly he might yet be alive, but in a situation of peril or difficulty, from which he could not extricate himself, and in this case the aid of these bold fishers, experienced cragsmen all, would be indispensable.

As they rode up to the little fishing colony they descried a group of three seated against a boat, and a tall young man leaning over them. All had their backs towards them, and were talking with animation, unaware of the approach of strangers, for the sound of the horses' hoofs was deadened by the soft turf.

"But I say, Jem Pollock," the young man was saying. "What did this affair really look like? It may have been a cloud, you know."

"Well, you see, zur, it was a big black thing—yet not black so be it, but zumtimes you could see through it like. No, zur, it weren't no cloud. Why, thur worn't a cloud in the sky. And thur it was on top o' The Skegs, and when I come 'ome I told Daddy here, and, 'Jem,' he says, 'that what you've seen is the Dorrien wraith, and'—Oh, Lord, save us!"

All turned quickly. Not half a dozen yards off, the two gentlemen had reined in their horses. General Dorrien's face was as white as a sheet, and the hand which held his bridle reins, though clenched and rigid, was trembling. That he had heard those last words was plain, but that one of his stern temperament should be so strangely moved by a mere bit of popular superstition seemed inexplicable.

"Your servant, gentlemen!" said old Mat Pollock, hobbling to his feet, assisted by his stalwart son, Jem, which worthy seafarer looked sorely abashed in the presence in

which he so suddenly found himself, and which coming about, too, so soon upon his narrative of the apparition, disturbed his superstitious soul not a little.

Briefly, but clearly, Mr. Curtis explained the situation, and how a search party was needed without delay, and the white-haired patriarch of the hamlet, though he had no love for the house of Dorrien, at once issued his mandates accordingly. Most of the hands were away in the boats, he said, but here were his two lads, Jem and David, who, by the way, had both well turned forty. Then they might turn out a couple of boys more—and there was—well, he didn't know whether he might make so bold, but—— And here he looked inquiringly at the young gentleman with whom the three had been conversing.

"I trust, Mr. Curtis, that General Dorrien will allow me to take part in this search," said Eustace Ingelow, stepping forward—"I know this coast thoroughly, and can keep my head at any height, as these good fellows here will tell you," he added, eagerly looking from one to the other.

The General was about stiffly to decline, but Mr. Curtis interrupted quickly.

"We shall be only too glad, Eustace. We want all the hands and eyes we can get, I'm afraid, and I know what a fellow you are for risking your neck. Are you ready?" he went on, looking around. "Then the sooner we start the better."

It was between one and two o'clock, and the day was cloudy and lowering. Not many hours of daylight would remain to them, for the evenings closed in fast at this time of year. Considerable excitement was rife in the fishing village as the party moved off, women and children standing about the doors talking volubly in their rude dialect. It was arranged that Eustace Ingelow, with Jem Pollock and one of the boys, should accompany General Dorrien along the top of the cliffs, while David Pollock and the other boy and the parson thoroughly searched the beach below, both divisions moving in concert. A couple of powerful telescopes, three coils of rope, of sufficient stoutness and length, with two strong crow-bars, constituted the equipment of the party; nor must we omit to mention a flask of brandy, which Jem Pollock privately hinted to

Eustace, with a wink at the General, might be making the Squire a party to a bit of smuggling.

And Eustace himself was thinking, as they ascended the steep, turfy slopes, what a great piece of luck this was which had fallen in his way. What if he should be the fortunate finder of the missing man? In common decency the General could hardly give him the cold shoulder after rescuing his son; but, on the other hand, it might be—probably would be—only the poor fellow's dead body that they would find. For an opinion had gained ground among the party that Hubert Dorrien had either fallen over the cliffs, in which case there would be very little chance for him, or that he had gone down on the beach and had been cut off by the tide, a contingency equally fatal, the only hope being that in the former event he might have fallen on to a ledge—for the cliffs were broken and rugged, and such projections abounded; or that in the latter he had gained some refuge whence he was unable subsequently to escape.

"Look over, Jem, lad, and see if you see nowt. There, on the ledge just below the footway," bawled David Pollock from the beach, after intently scanning with his glass the most dangerous point of the face of Hadden's Slide. A thin mist had begun to drive along the cliff, but a black object, not unlike the body of a man, might be discerned at the point indicated.

Jem obeyed, and, lying down, peered long and anxiously from the dizzy brink.

"It's nowt!" he shouted in return. "Only a heap o' grass or suchlike," and the search went on.

"I fear we shall soon be overtaken by the darkness," observed the General, moodily looking round. They had passed a queer little cottage in the hollow, and a woman came out to answer their enquiries, but could add nothing whatever to their knowledge. Another false alarm, too, had been raised by those on the beach.

"I'm afraid so, sir," answered Eustace. "But we shall have time to get as far as Smugglers' Ladder," he added encouragingly, "and I don't think your son would have had time to get much further than that, if he intended coming back from his walk in fair time. See, it would be

about in line with the point where he was last seen, and he was going in that direction."

They reached the little hollow. Before and around lay a few rocks and boulders half embedded in the springy turf. A couple of hooded crows flew up and winged their flight downward along the face of the cliffs, uttering a harsh croak, and before them yawned the black chasm with its jagged, slippery sides. Both Eustace and Jem Pollock fearlessly gazed down into its depths.

Suddenly the former uttered an exclamation and sprang to his feet. On the very brink of the fissure, hanging to a short tuft of rank, dry herbage, was a piece of thin, black silk cord—such as is used for securing an eyeglass. Closer inspection showed that the grass itself had been violently crushed.

"I think we are getting nearer, sir." he gently remarked, showing it to the General, who was visibly agitated, but made no reply. "Now, Jem, give us a light here, quick."

The man obeyed, and forthwith large pieces of burning paper were dropped into the chasm, bringing its rocky facets and roughly-hewn cells and recesses into view to those above. Nothing was visible, however.

"Now, Jem, bear a hand with that belaying-pin; sharp's the word," cried Eustace, waxing nautical again in his excitement, as he took the stoutest of the crow-bars from the other's hand, and looking around for a second, his quick eye lit upon a crevice in the rock, into which the iron bar was promptly driven. "Here! shake out that brace—that's it. Now. Is it long enough?" anxiously, as Jem Pollock dropped the coil of rope into the chasm to test its length, keeping the other end in his hand.

"Not quite, sir, but the two together will do it, easily. But better let me go down, sir; I understand it better nor you."

"I daresay you do, but I'm lighter, you see, and you'd make a better hand at working the apparatus up here than I should. Now heave it over!"

"What are you going to do?" asked General Dorrien, who had been a silent witness to these rapid preparations.

"I'm just going quietly down the Ladder, sir," answered

Eustace. "The poor fellow may have got into some place where we can't see him, and not be able to call out."

"Really, Mr.—a—Ingelow—I can't consent to your running this risk," answered the General, greatly moved. "Now, this man is accustomed to it. Therefore let him go down."

"No risk at all, sir, I assure you. Only an easy climb. I wish it might be successful," answered Eustace, as he threw off his jacket, and, aided by the fisher lad, let himself carefully over.

"You'll ha' to be quick down there, 'cause of the tide," warned Jem Pollock, who was devoting his energies to keeping the crow-bar steady. "You can't come up again this way, I'm thinkin.' And jes' tell them down there to hurry a bit, for she's a rollin' in fast and steady."

"All right," cried Eustace as he made his way down. The rope was a regular climbing rope, knotted at intervals; but the depth was considerable, and before he had got halfway, the athletic young fellow began to feel that he would need all his powers. Indeed, although he had made light of any idea of risk in the matter, he now realised that there was plenty of it. The perspiration streamed from every pore, and it was all he could do at times to avoid being hurled from his dizzy position by the swaying of the rope and the consequent friction of his knuckles against the hard surface of the rock.

Although dark enough from above, yet once in the fissure, sufficient light penetrated from the outside to render all its recesses plainly visible, and as the intrepid youth made his way down deeper and deeper, the more strongly did the conviction take hold of him that he would indeed find Hubert Dorrien at the bottom, but it would be in the form of a shattered, ghastly and unrecognisable corpse. Not an encouraging or nerve-steadying reflection for one in his perilous position, but Eustace Ingelow, with his brave heart and good conscience, felt that it would take more than this to cause his nerve to fail. And now all sounds were hushed, and save for the laboured breathing of the climber and the occasional rattle of dislodged stones, falling with a hollow echo to the bottom of the abyss, the silence was almost oppressive.

"Is he safe?" whispered the anxious father to Jem Pollock, as the sound of something heavy reaching the ground was borne upward.

"Ay, sir, he is," replied the other gravely. The stout fisherman had never ceased to reproach himself for allowing a lad like that to venture upon such an errand while he himself remained safe at the top. What would he find down there, he wondered?

And Eustace was thinking the same, as, very much exhausted, he thankfully realised that his feet were once more on solid ground. His heart beat fast and irregularly as he peered about in the dim half light, expecting every moment to meet with a horrible sight. But the cave was empty. A big crab sidled away into a dark corner, with its formidable nippers extended menacingly, and shoals of smaller ones ran spiderlike into the little pools of water left by the tide in the rocks and sand. The green, slimy walls were hung with sea-weed and studded with pointed limpets, but of anything human there was no trace.

No trace. Stay—what was that? A gleam of something caught his eye—something that lay half-buried in the sand. He picked it up, and his heart gave a great jump. It was a small and curiously-wrought silver matchbox.

A shout outside and Mr. Curtis and his party joined him. In the flurry of his excitement and the exhaustion following upon his perilous and violent exertions, Eustace handed over his discovery to the vicar. The next moment he would have given anything to have kept it quietly to himself. Why, he could not for the life of him have told—one of those strange and most unerring instincts.

"I fancy there's no doubt now as to the poor fellow's fate," said Mr. Curtis. "He must have fallen from above, and even if he lived after it, must have been carried away by the tide. See, the high-water mark is a good many feet above our heads as we stand here."

They looked up. It was as he said. Even at the highest point in the fissure, wherever they could stand, the wet slimy water-line was beyond their reach. A shout

was heard above, and Jem Pollock's face could be seen peering over the brink.

"The tide!" he shouted. "Get away out o' that as fast as ever ye can. She's a comin' into the bight like a racer, and it'll take ye all your time."

No further warning was necessary, and they hastened to act upon this one. Hubert Dorrien's sad fate was established beyond doubt, and unless his body was ultimately washed up on the beach, he would be no more seen until the day when the sea should give up her dead.

An hour later the party joined hands on the cliff. Further search was useless, for it was now quite dark. Next day it might be continued; and then it would be not for the living, but for the mangled remnants of the dead.

"I have greatly to thank you, Mr. Ingelow," said the General, his face very white and set and his speech forced. "Your help has been most valuable, and of the courage and energy you have displayed I cannot think too highly. And to you, too, my men, I must tender my thanks for your efforts towards the rescue or recovery of my unfortunate son. I cannot talk more about it at present, but you may be sure I shall not forget it. Good-night."

He extended his hand to Eustace, who warmly grasped it.

"Believe me, General Dorrien, I would gladly have done more to have met with better success," he said in a tone of sympathetic respect. And Eustace, in the midst of that sorrowful scene, could not feel so depressed as he told himself he ought, for athwart it there smiled upon him, though mournfully now, Nellie's sweet face, and he felt she was nearer within his reach than he had of late so much as dared to dream.

The party separated on the dark cliff's brow and the General and Mr. Curtis rode sadly home.

And that night in the stately mansion a bitter cry went up, and the voice of great mourning—a mother sorrowing for her lost and passionately loved son, whose voice she was destined never again to hear on this side of the grave.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"DEATH'S ALTAR, BY THE LONE SHORE."

A FORTNIGHT had slipped away since Hubert Dorrien's disappearance, and still the stranger stayed on at "The Silver Fleece," in Battisford. Those who had at first marvelled what attraction their dull little town had for one of his stamp had quite ceased speculating as to his pursuits and identity. As to the former, they had come to the conclusion that he was an antiquary of some sort—a professor most likely, and a member of some learned society—who was engaged on a work on the curiosities and antiquities of the neighbourhood, which he spent long days in exploring, asking many questions about it, and when not thus employed, he would shut himself up and sit for hours writing. As to the latter, well, it didn't signify. Anyone could see that he was a gentleman born, and sure enough, didn't he pay his way, and wasn't he pleasant-spoken and friendly with everybody? So "The Silver Fleece" was right glad of its guest, and would fain keep him as long as he chose to stay. He got his letters, too, quite regularly, addressed to Robert Durnford, Esq., and now and then a learned looking pamphlet. What more could Battisford desire in the way of vouchers for his respectability?

In Battisford, sooner than in Wandsborough, Hubert Dorrien's sad fate ceased to be a nine days' wonder. It was talked of occasionally on market days by farmers assembled at their one o'clock dinner in the coffee room at "The Silver Fleece," and in the evening sometimes the loquacious waiter would entertain a batch of newly arrived "commercials," over their hot spirits and water, with a highly graphic narrative of the event, to which the accompaniment of the supernatural lent unusual spice. Sometimes in these conversations the stranger would join,

putting in a careless remark or two, or asking a question, but never by any chance would he attempt avoidance of the subject.

And what was Roland Dorrien's real frame of mind, having committed a ruthless and what the world might call a cowardly murder? It is a strange thing to have to record, but the fact is he felt no great compunction. He had spent some of the most impressionable years of his life in the Far West, where human life was held at the lowest possible valuation, and he had known of at least a dozen instances where men had been shot dead upon far less provocation than he had received. Besides, he had not particularly meant to kill the other; unfortunately, the mouth of the fissure had been inconveniently close.

But he whom he had slain was his brother—his own mother's son. Well, what of that? Relationship was a mere accident, in his case an accident in no sense to his advantage, and all the twaddle written and talked about blood being thicker than water, and family affection and so on, but the "thinnest" of cant. And had not this precious brother of his, not content with supplanting him in his inheritance, taken advantage of his downfall to blacken his name, so that she whom he loved and who had loved him as he felt persuaded she would never again love, even she had, in all probability, brought herself to regard his memory as a loathsome thing; something to be put far from her? Then, to crown all, those insulting words. Yes—whatever had occurred, the other had brought upon himself and had richly deserved, and now, as it happened, it was perhaps as well that the popular verdict should be one of accidental death.

And had this man no conscience? Since there was no chance of his being brought to the bar of human justice, had he no fear of the great Hereafter? He had none. He could meet it, whatever it was, without flinching. If he did not altogether disbelieve in a future existence, he was at any rate firmly convinced that for himself it could hold no worse state of things than did the present. That was impossible, for he was utterly without hope in the world.

And now he had made up his mind to leave Battisford.

He had remained there long enough to avoid the suspicion that would inevitably have attached to a casual stranger coming and going coincidently with the fatality—now he would go. He had not seen Olive Ingelow since the brief glimpse he had obtained of her in the lamp-lit street that fateful evening, and it was better so. He was hard as adamant now, cold, stony—all his natural impulses petrified at their source. One glance into those sweet eyes: one pitiful, tender tone of the dear voice, and all might be undone. He would soften again, melt for the time, and his overthrow would be complete. No, he would not behold her face again, but he would once more, and for the last time, re-visit Wandsborough, arriving towards nightfall, and then the next day he would leave the scene of his wrecked life for ever.

There are some men whom one is constrained to believe were sent into the world to enjoy prosperity, if only for the reason that they are so wofully and completely unfitted to sustain adversity. We must fall foul of another popular cant in asserting that adversity does not strengthen them, neither does it bring out sterling qualities which otherwise would never have seen the light. In no way does it benefit them; on the contrary, they succumb to it and sink down, down, lower and lower, till their ruin is complete. In some occult way this may be a Providential dispensation; we are told that everything is; but, if so, why then to the observer of human nature is it of all things the most marvellous?

Just such a man as this was Roland Dorrien. His rightful place in society he would have filled with credit—it is even probable that under favourable circumstances he would have adorned it; for he had plenty of good qualities, which, in their proper sphere, would have shone out to the advantage of himself and of those who came within his influence. But he was the last person in the world who should have been marked out for adversity, and with his natural temperament and the fatal way in which he had been brought up, or rather left to grow, it was no wonder that he succumbed.

What man but one who had temporarily taken leave of his better judgment—not to say his senses—would have

mapped out for himself such a plan as that which he now proposed? To revisit the scenes of his former prosperity; to wander morbidly over the paths consecrated to his memory by the tenderest associations of love and happiness and bright hopes, knowing perfectly well that the joys of past days must ever be to him as the turned-down page of a sealed book—could mania itself carry a man to greater, to more unreasoning lengths? Yet this is what he deliberately resolved to do.

He would walk along the beach to Wandsborough. The tide was low in the afternoon, and he would be less likely to meet anybody that way. So, arming himself with an overcoat and umbrella, for the day was cloudy and lowering, he sallied forth.

A group of men were standing round the door of the taproom as he passed. Of them he took no notice at first, till a voice arrested his attention—a voice saying in a strong Scotch accent:

"—And I tell ye what it is, Williams. Ye just won't see the young Squire back again. The General hates him wurrse than h—l, and 'd sooner burrn the place down than see him in it, even nouw."

For the life of him Roland could not resist turning his head, and his eyes met those of Johnston, the Cranston gardener. Then he kept on his way. Had the other recognised him? he wondered. Their glances had met full. The Scot was a shrewd fellow, and his gaze might have penetrated even this inimitable disguise. If so, why, the sooner he disappeared from Battisford the better, for if it was in Johnston's power to work him mischief he would certainly do so—and it was. But it would not do to look round again, and, after all, why should he care?

He walked rapidly forward, and soon the town was left out of sight behind. A few sheep browsing the short grass on the turfy down scampered off a little distance and stood watching him as he made his way to the beach; but not a soul did he meet, and at length, as he reached the shore, it seemed to him that he stood in the world alone. He walked on, a great seething, tumbling plain on his left, the white, curling billows chasing each other obedient to the propulsion of a strong and freshening breeze, their

foam-crests leaping to the misty sky. A flying scud partly hid the tall cliffs, and then passed, and the crescent-like bays and looming promontories of the iron coast-line stood clear above the restless, leaden-hued waters. A scene of wild, solitary grandeur. The cold salt breeze played upon his face; the roll and hiss of the white waves breaking on the beach seemed full of voices speaking from that happier Past as the exile wended his way along the lone shore; and in the tones of the rising gale he could hear in a far-off, dreamy way the voice as he had heard it when they walked together over this very ground.

All the deepest chords in the man's wretched, storm-tossed soul were harrowed and unstrung. This wild reach of roaring surf, and looming cliffs, and pebbly shingle, with the strong, chill winds resisting his advance, was to him as hallowed ground—to be trodden reverently, and to be lingered on as one is loth to leave the last haven. His head was bent low to resist the fury of the sudden gust which met him as he staggered round a projecting arm of the cliff, and his thoughts were given up to the free play of wildest fancy.

"God or demon—whoever you are that makes such a wretched muddle of the affairs of poor mortals," he murmured in his despair, "take my soul—my life—anything—and plunge it in torments untold for all the ages if you will. Only bring *her* to me—here—let me see her here for one short half-hour!"

He was hardly conscious of having spoken aloud. It seemed to him but one among many unuttered wishes; and now, as he looked up, his face became ashy and his eyes were fixed, staring and dilated, while he stood rooted to the spot, unable to stir a limb. For not twenty yards off, alone in this remote spot, in the misty twilight of the darkening afternoon, stood the figure of a woman. She was leaning lightly upon a low rock, with one small, shapely hand, gazing out to sea. Her delicate profile was towards him, but there was a mournfulness in the sweet, sad face, and the repose of the mouth was that of one who had well-nigh forgotten how to laugh. A tress or two of soft, dark hair had escaped, and with this the wind was playing wild havoc. Yet she was heedless of it and of all

around, and stood there calm and undisturbed, like a beautiful goddess of the wild stormy coast.

His invocation had been answered.

"Olive!"

His voice came harsh and inarticulate. She turned, startled at the strange sound, though not catching the name, and her face paled. Who could this intruder be? She was alone with him and at his mercy, and he looked so wild and queer. She was very frightened, and for a moment all manner of horrid conjecture flashed through her brain. She felt sickly and faint. An escaped lunatic, was one of her first thoughts, having dismissed the tramp theory—and she noticed that he was tall and strong of build, and well-dressed, withal. And he was approaching her.

"Have you lost your way?" she began gently, striving hard to repress the apprehensive tremor in her voice.

"Olive! Don't *you* know me?"

With a low cry she sank down on the rock, and sat gazing wildly at him with a white, scared face.

"It is *his* voice—Roland!"

The spell was broken. He was beside her, and his arms were round her while he poured into her ears passionate words of tender reassurance. And it would be difficult to determine which of the two was most startled by the unexpected meeting.

"My love—my love! Why did you leave me all this long time?" she murmured at last.

Not an intonation of reproach towards himself on her account, only on his own, as if she had said, "Why did you leave me—your haven of refuge when the storm came upon you? Why did you leave me, who would have cleaved to you in adversity—who would have clung to you through evil report a hundred times closer than through good?"

"Yes—why did I?"

He had removed his glasses, and stood before her his old self—but such a shadow of it! She was horrified.

"What have you been doing with yourself?" she said. "Have you been trying to die?"

Then he laughed—a harsh, bitter laugh. It rang back from the cliffs in weird, mocking echo.

"Oh, no. The Fates are not so kind. Why did I leave you, you say? Everything was against us. Your father would not listen to me, even when I had my head above water—how could I expect him to when it was below, with no prospect of ever rising to the surface again? You, yourself, would never have acted contrary to his wishes, even if I had been in a position to urge you to—and for this I should be the last to blame you, understand that, well. But for me, an utterly ruined man, to hold you bound to me for life, was just the one thing I could not do."

"Go on."

"Well, we never saw each other again after that informal parting in Wandsborough street," he went on. "I hoped—I mean I tried to hope—you would forget me and be happy again. After all, why should you not? Only three or four short months—a summer dream."

His voice was harsh and grating. At times it seemed that he would choke.

"A summer dream! My whole life was lived within that summer dream," she whispered, more to herself than to him. "Roland, you will not leave me again!"

His haggard eyes devoured the sweet face which was bent down upon his hands, and he felt that if hell itself opened to receive him its torments would be rest compared with what he was undergoing at that moment. The pleading voice, the little hands imprisoning his own as she leant upon him, giving herself to him as it were in all the rich fulness of her love—this for which he had hungered and agonised, sleeping and waking, during the long weary period of his hopeless exile, and which, now that he had obtained it, he must deliberately forego. In one short hour, in fact, he would be apart from her, in bitter loneliness once more. No—there was no hope. His pride was a part of himself. Penniless and an outcast, how could he keep for himself and wear this priceless jewel? And now he was something more—he bore a burden that not all the untold wealth of ages could take from him. And yet at this moment he felt as if he could imbrue his hands in the most pitiless of crimes, to obtain the wealth which should save them both.

"My darling, you will not leave me again!"

Not the scud in the dark, lowering sky above—not the wild waves plunging and careering before the shrieking wind, to hurl themselves madly upon yonder sharp rocks—not the whirl of air and water and vaporous cloud, was more storm-tossed and chaotic than the thoughts which surged through the man's soul, and flashed with well-nigh the fires of mania in his overwrought brain. His reply came—hoarse and labouring.

"I must."

The sweet, sad face sank down upon his hands, which her own were grasping with an almost convulsive clutch, and a shiver like a great choking sob ran through her. She had found him—the wanderer whom everybody else had lost sight of. She had found him, as was her right, for he belonged to her. She had found him—how then could she let him wander from her again, away into the outer darkness of the cold, wide world! All too lightly had she valued those days in the by-gone past, until they had fled, never to return.

O fairest summer, with thy many-hued glories of rich verdure, and heathery-crimson and golden-tinted hills keeping watch above an azure sea! O halcyon time, of vows whispered amid the radiance of a passing glow from Heaven's bright plains, as the westering sun drove his great amber-wheeled chariot down to his rest, shedding back an ethereal lustre upon a love-dawn which should lend a hundredfold more of beauty to a beauteous world—where are you now? Gone. And you—leaden waves, tossing wildly to the misty wrack above—storm-blast howling o'er the watery waste—cliffs spectral and gray, throwing back with hollow echo the surges' tone—to you it is given, in mocking fitness, to behold the anguish of two breaking hearts, here on the lone sea-shore!

"It was never intended we should part again," she murmured without looking up. "Oh! why should you have been brought here to-day? I never visit this place now, and to-day it must have been something more than chance that made me do so."

"I don't believe in your Heaven, or why should it delight to torture any living creature as it is torturing us, here, to-day," broke jerkily from his set, dry lips. "Listen,

Olive—darling, and you will understand why I must leave you again. I am destitute at this moment, utterly destitute; one who has gone down beneath the weight of what some might call a curse—but I don't believe in such things. And above and beside all this there is—there is—a barrier between us—a barrier of my own raising, and with its shadow I would never cloud your dear life."

"Oh, Roland. What is it?"

"Ah! If I were to tell you, you would shrink from me, now and for ever. You would even rush into yonder sea to escape from the horror wherewith my presence would inspire you. Why, even your love would turn to repugnance. Yet why should it?—except that the trammelled imagination of a canting world reads crime into what is no crime at all."

"You are quite wrong. I would do none of all this," she answered bravely. A horrid suspicion that the rumours she had heard about him might be true flashed through her mind. What if he had done in a moment of weak desperation that which nothing but death could undo?

"I had never expected to look upon your dear face again," he went on in the same tones of heart-wrung misery. "I set out this day to visit for the last time the scenes we had looked upon together, and to break my heart over the memories that they would evoke. Then, as I trod these stones which your feet had trodden, as on holy ground, I invoked the aid of the demon who rules the universe—offering my life and limitless future of eternity, if such there be—for one glimpse of you. And I was answered. I looked up and there you stood. Now I care nothing for what may happen. I can face it without fear—for my prayer was answered."

Her tears were falling like rain, and for some time she could not speak—could only cling to him all the firmer.

"You shall not go," she said at length. "You belong to me. A hundred times more than when all things went well with you. Oh, my darling, do not leave me. I claim you now, for you belong to me!" she reiterated passionately.

It may be that to some lives comes a period such as that

which these two had to undergo at this moment; it cannot be that it comes to many. But even while she spoke, another had claimed them both—ay, and had already made good his claim. With swift, remorseless subtlety the dark waves came sweeping in. The King of Terrors was about to exact the fulfilment of his awful bargain—and to exact it with interest.

"Olive, come. We must go, and go quickly."

She gazed at him in surprise. His tone had changed to one of calmness, almost indifference, except for a quick anxiety, which her ear detected.

"It will be all we can do to turn the corner over there before the water is even knee-deep."

She followed his glance, and her face paled slightly. Nearly a mile of beach lay between them and the jutting headland, whose base even now was all but hidden by the inflowing tide. As the waves receded, a few yards of ground were left visible, but the next roller or two swept over it completely, breaking into angry foam against the rock. Full well she knew—full well both of them knew—the perilous nature of the coast, for every year added its quota to the list of victims of the treacherous tides.

"We shall never do it, Roland."

"We must try. Come along."

He hurried her forward, and, with the aid of his strong right arm, she had no difficulty in keeping pace with him. But the beach was pebbly and yielding, and before they had gone a hundred yards the consciousness broke upon them that the desired point would be ten or twelve feet under water by the time they should reach it.

"Can't be done. We must give it up," he said anxiously, coming to a halt. "Our only chance is to try back. The beach is not so narrow on the Battisford side. We must look sharp, too, or the point behind us will be covered."

The treacherous waves were creeping up to the promontory he had come round. To remain where they were was hopeless, for in less than an hour the whole of the bay would be completely swept by the sea, which would be breaking against the cliffs many feet higher than their heads as they then stood.

"Now, Olive! It is our only chance."

Breathless and panting from the pace at which she had come over the heavy yielding ground, Olive resigned herself with a shiver to be half dragged, half carried through the belt of milky surf which barred their passage round the rocky promontory, and it was all her companion could do to support her and keep his own footing amid the powerful wash and swirl of the receding waves, for he had been obliged to watch his opportunity and make a dash through between the inflowing waves, and, being knee-deep in water, with the pebbly ground beneath his feet, uncertain and shifting in the treacherous "undertow," the wonder is that both were not carried away there and then. Yet it was only putting off the evil hour. Two minutes later and they stood within the next bay.

A quick, despairing ejaculation escaped Roland's lips. He had miscalculated his distance, and now the strip of beach by which he had reckoned they would be able to effect their escape was a mass of great rolling breakers. To retrace their steps was impossible, even were it of any use. There was no more means of exit from this bay than from the one they had just left. They had but exchanged one death-trap for another.

Then they stood still and stole a furtive look at each other, and all hope died away within their hearts. To the mind of each there came the same thought. The man's wild prayer and desperate vow had been heard and answered. The King of Terrors was about to exact the fulfilment of the awful bargain—and to exact it with interest—and the great, cruel sea, which alone had witnessed and registered the reckless vow, was now lending itself and its rage a willing instrument for the pitiless fulfilment of that vow.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW.

"OLIVE, it is I who have brought you to your death!"

His face was ghastly with the horror of his self-reproach and desperation. The two were standing now, locked in each other's embrace, beneath the cliff, watching the narrow strip of beach rapidly disappear as the fierce tide came pouring in. Nothing could be seen immediately above, for the rock beetled overhead as though about to topple upon them, but running out on each side of the bay rose a crescent of frowning wall. And from thence no succour need be expected, for its summit was lost in the gathering mist. The winter twilight was fast descending, the chill blast howled and shrieked over the heaving, storm-lashed main, and a chaos of driving, leaping billows, whose great leaden backs and white rearing crests rose hideous and spectral in the gloaming as they dashed the one upon the other in their tumultuous rush, flinging themselves high against the adamantine walls and falling back with a roar and a hiss. The grim coast-line was enveloped in wreaths of white spray, and the surf-lashed base of the heights rang again as it repelled the onset of each watery monster, while in showers of milky foam the sea ran from the black, slippery rocks. A scene of wild grandeur, unparalleled in its tremendous loneliness—a terrible scene, even when viewed from a point of safety. What must it then have been to the two who stood there awaiting an inevitable death!

"It is I who have brought you to this!"

She looked up at him and nestled more closely in his embrace. In the midst of her bodily fear—the natural fear of a weak woman suddenly brought face to face with a horrible death—she was able to smile. And it was a smile of unselfish reassurance.

"No, dearest. It is not your doing," she said. "If it had not been for finding me here, you would have gone your way in safety. Roland—it is *I* who have destroyed *you*."

"By heaven—no!" he broke in passionately. "I would sooner die with you than live without you. But nothing can get rid of the fact that it is owing to me that you are here at all. You, for whom I would have given five hundred lives—would have lost the salvation of a thousand souls to see in safety now. Oh, my darling—my heart's sweet love—will not your God again take me at my word and work a miracle to save only you!" he added with a despairing, bitter cry, as he sank upon his knees at her feet, still clasping her with both his arms.

She bent her face down till it rested against his, and her soft, caressing hands were round his neck.

"Hush—my own!" she said. "Do not talk in that desperate way. A very little while, and we shall be united to part no more. We—you especially—have been terribly tried; now we are about to pass through the waters of death, but our sweet Saviour is very merciful. He will not part us again."

Her calm courage and the solemn conviction of her tender tones seemed to breathe a halo of peace amid that jarring scene of storm and chaos. Their faces were wet with the showers of salt spray, and the girl's soft hair, partially unfastened, was tossed rudely about by the cutting wind. The thunder of the surf upon the shore and the shrieking of the fierce gale drowned all other sound, yet in an interval in the turmoil, her voice could be heard fervently praying. She pleaded that if it was agreeable to the Divine Will they might be rescued from their imminent peril, but if not, and it was appointed to them now to pass through the awful waters of death, that grace might be given them both patiently to undergo whatever period of penance might be necessary to their purification, so that they might at last be united, never again to part, safe in the Heavenly Country. Then, with her head upon her lover's shoulder, his arms around her, and her hands in his, it seemed to Olive Ingelow that the world was very far away, and she could await with perfect resignation the

short but terrible struggle which should set them both free.

Rolling in, huge and awful in the dim gloaming, the mighty billows roared nearer and nearer, hurling great masses of milky foam at their very feet. They could hardly see each other's face in the weird, sepulchral light.

"Roland, we are close to Smugglers' Ladder, are we not?"

He started at the sound of her voice, in which there was a ring of hope.

"Quite close. Why?"

"Is there no chance of escape that way?"

He shook his head sadly.

"None whatever. I had thought of that, but it seemed better to—to face the worst here in the open than to be drowned like rats in a hole. Why, the tide runs up it like a mill-race."

He had thought of it, and now her suggestion revived the ghastliness of the idea. What a terrible revenge of Fate! Come what might there could be no hope. Had the awful Shape been seen upon The Skegs again? Would not men be discussing the apparition with bated breath the next morning as the chill dawn revealed to the eyes of the devoted searchers two drowned corpses? Could this legion of leaping, hungry billows be the same blue, smiling, peaceful sea, on whose shore they two had sat together, when from Olive's lips he first heard about the drear tale of violence and revenge which overshadowed the spot as with a curse. If he were to meet his end in that place of all others? Then another idea struck him. They might by singular good luck find some ledge that would place them above the reach of the waters. He himself had no such hope, but it was just barely possible.

"It is our only chance," he continued, "and the very poorest of poor ones. But come; we will try it."

On they sped, straining every nerve to reach the great jagged rent in the cliff, which they could see not far ahead. Farther than they thought, though, for as they stood within its dismal portals, the advance-guard of the tide already swirled knee-deep around them.

Gloomy and terrible in the extreme was the aspect of the

chasm. The last faint light from without, straggling through, here and there fell upon the black, slippery rock, and the bellowing of the surf as it came dashing in, white and seething, was echoed in hollow clamour up the sides of the abyss. No light was visible above, and the atmosphere within this hideous cave hung cold and dank as the breaths of the grave. And upon the man who knew the grisly secret which these slimy walls had witnessed and had kept so well, the horrors of the place weighed an hundredfold. The outer darkness; the roaring and hissing of the great surges; the shriek of the gale and the flapping of the long wisps of seaweed against the face of the rock; all were as accusing voices—the exultant gibbering of demons come to claim their just due—and it seemed to his overtaxed brain that ghostly hands were stretched forth to drag him to his everlasting woe. A cold sweat was on his brow and his knees trembled under him. Were it not that a most precious life depended on his exertions, he would have yielded up the struggle then and there, and have plunged headlong into the boiling surf.

It was of no avail. They had immured themselves in their living tomb. A dozen great seas came sweeping in one after the other, and the chasm was a mass of white, churning water dashing backwards and forwards with resistless velocity. They had retreated as far as they could go, and now stood up to the waist in water. The very next wave would carry them off their feet—and then——

It came—crashing high against the cliff overhead, and whirling back with lightning speed. Then another and another, and Roland Dorrien was struggling in the surge—alone.

Oh, the agony of that moment! Even while battling wildly for a minute more of dear life, the awful, aching void of separation was the only consciousness he retained—that he was not to be allowed even to die with her hand clasped in his. We know that a man can dream the events of hours in as many seconds. In this fleeting moment this man endured an eternity of everlasting woe. He was separated from her in death—he would be separated from her in the future life—and his lot would be among the lost for ever.

Then his senses began to fail. He was hurled to and fro, there was a roaring in his ears; he was sinking —down, down, down—then up again into black space. Then he struck against hard rock—his footing was firm. Instinctively he threw out his hands and grasped something long and trailing; the waters fell back, and with a mighty effort he resisted their suction. He was on a ledge.

But Olive? Had the Eternal Vengeance spared him and taken her life? Was she drowned and dead in that hell-cave while he was doomed to live? No—a thousand times no!

And then a cry, so awful and blood-curdling in its unspeakable agony, rang out above the thundrous turmoil in that grisly cave, as surely was never emitted from human breast before. It rose above the bellowing of the mighty surges, it rang upward through the black sides of the chasm, with many a weird echo—upward into the outer air —upward, till assuredly it must have mounted to the very throne of high Heaven.

"Great God! Great God! Spare her and take me!"

But a grim spectre stood at his side—only a voice from the pit of the grave answered in his ear:

"Life for life. Blood for blood. Live on, accursed one, but her thou shalt never behold again in this world or in that which is to come. Never—never!"

The survivor stood for a moment on the edge of the black, slippery rock, straining his haggard eyes as he strove to pierce the gloom through which the white, seething foam was dimly rushing.

"Never—never!" he shouted, with a maniacal laugh, and poising himself he leaped headlong into the surf.

What was that? As he rose, something came in contact with him. It was a human body, limp, lifeless. A thrill of the most exquisite relief shot through his heart. He had found her. And now he felt that he had the strength of a hundred men. Half-a-dozen powerful, yet judicious strokes—for to be dashed against the rock would be fatal—and he was again grasping the ledge. A wave swept up, lifting them high in the air, but he clung to his hold with the tenacity of despair, and then, before he

knew how it was done, he was crouching on the ledge, holding the girl's insensible form in his arms.

Was she dead? Ah, no. He could hear her faint, regular breathing as he pressed his lips to hers. Wave after wave swept their precarious refuge, but now he was filled with a new hope. They had been spared for a purpose. Even if they were to die they would die together, and this reflection was sufficient to fill him with the keenest bliss after the awful agony of that moment of separation.

With one foot planted firmly against a projection in the rock, and grasping with both hands the slender and precarious hold which the seaweed and rock afforded above, Roland Dorrien crouched there for two long hours in the pitchy darkness, supporting the girl's unconscious form. Waves surged over them, and more than once it was all he could do to avoid being swept from the slanting ledge, and his muscles cracked as he strained every nerve to resist the potent suction of the receding seas. For two long hours he dared not move a finger or alter his position by a hair's breadth, and his laboured breathing was loud and stertorous in the intervals between the howling of the waves in the cavernous gloom and the hollow, metallic echoes, like the booming toll of a great bell, which thundered from the overhanging rocks. At length, when his exhausted strength threatened to bear no more, he suddenly realised that the onslaughts of the waves were becoming less frequent, and their force when they did come was weaker. Surely the tide had turned.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CAIN.

"ARE you here, Roland?"

The tone was the faintest of whispers, but the voice was as if the silvern echoes of heavenly harps had suddenly been wafted to the listener's anxious ear. He could hardly murmur a reply.

"Where are we? How dark it is!" continued she, in an awed whisper.

"We are safe."

"Safe?—Oh, I remember."

"Don't talk yet, my darling. Lie still and let yourself be perfectly at rest, as much so as you can, that is, in this uncomfortable attitude. We shall have to hold on here for some time longer."

"But you?"

"Never mind me. Wait. That's better now," shifting his position. And, indeed, it was a real relief—so great had been the strain upon his powers.

"Now try to sleep," he continued. "We shall have to stay here for some time; in fact, it will be difficult to get down in the dark. We were literally washed up here—and here we had better stay."

Though the seas no longer reached their place of refuge they still surged angrily through the chasm. Olive shivered.

"How cold it is!" she said faintly.

"Yes. Take a 'nip' of this. It is absolutely necessary!" he said, unscrewing the top of a small brandy flask.

She obeyed, for she felt very faint and exhausted. The potent cordial restored her a little and sent the blood coursing through her veins with renewed life.

"There! Fortunate I had it with me," he went on. "And now, darling, you must sleep if you can. You will be perfectly safe until they find us, for they will be sure to send out a strong search party."

"Poor dear father will be so horribly frightened. Roland, how soon can we go to him?" she asked faintly.

He made no reply at first. The question had called back his thoughts to the hard world again, to such as he more pitiless than the billows from which they had miraculously escaped, colder than the chill wind which whistled through the great dark vault. The exile's soul was bitter within him again. They two had gone down into the Valley of the Shadow of Death together, and had emerged thence, only to be parted once more.

"It will not be safe to go from here—until they find us," he replied. "But only think of the relief your father will experience when he finds you are safe! Why, it'll be worth while going through the suspense he is in at the present moment. While I——"

He checked himself. No words could depict the awful desperation which lay upon this man's soul at that dark hour. All his hopes in this life were dead—his very life itself was forfeited, could be claimed at any moment—and in the next he had little, if any, belief—certainly no hope. Why had the sea spared him, why had it not taken them both together, or, at any rate, him? Why was he not lying at rest for ever far beneath the tossing billows—beyond the reach of the storms and whirlwinds of this wretched life? Was he spared to eke out an accursed existence? Could there be any truth in the old story of Cain? He remembered it as one of the sacred teachings which had been instilled into his infantile mind with all the accompaniments of rod and task-room and unbending severity, and which he had since scouted, in common with other like stories, as a mere childish legend. "A wanderer on the face of the earth." Ah, but then his sentence had begun before he had earned it. The curse of Cain had been upon him before he had committed Cain's crime. And why had the temptation and opportunity been so thrust upon him? He had gone out that fatal night perfectly devoid of harmful intent—not so much as a

thought of it, indeed, had entered his head. He had returned a murderer.

Then a horrid thought came over him. What if the purpose for which he had been brought to this spot was not, after all, accomplished? What might not the terrible sea yield up? That face with its look of awful despair, upon which he had so pitilessly gazed in the wan moonlight, as it sank into the black abyss—how could he bear its unearthly look now, should it suddenly appear before him with glassy, upbraiding eyes, and features hideous from the effects of its long immersion? Even as this thought struck him he descried something floating in the water—something long and dark, like a human form. Great God—it was terrible! A cold perspiration broke out all over him as, with a dilated stare, he watched the awful object. What could it be, swaying helplessly backwards and forwards on the ebbing surge? Then it disappeared.

The midnight gloom deepened, and the chill breaths of the mist-laden blast swept through the great fissure, playing about his face like the cold touch of shadowy, spectral hands. Every sound was re-echoed with a hollow clang from the chasm's overhanging walls, and in the noise of falling water as it ran in torrents from the rocks with each receding swell, and in the many-tongued raving of the imprisoned surges, he seemed to hear the voice of a brother's blood crying from the deep, and to feel the flap of demon wings in his ears. Had he been alone in this ghastly solitude his very reason might have given way.

But now a blessed ray of light and hope beamed in upon the outer darkness. If he had destroyed life, had he not also saved it? This horrible abyss which had been the scene of his crime had also witnessed his act of reparation—or what might well stand as such—for now he could not help realising that had he not appeared on the beach when he did, his companion would never have retraced her steps in time—even apart from the delay of which he had been the cause. And she would have perished miserably, for her own unaided exertions would never have availed her to reach this place of refuge, or to take advantage of it when there, had she reached it.

The soft, regular breathing of the sleeping girl be-

tokened that her slumbers were peaceful. Her head rested on his shoulder as she reclined against him, a beautiful picture of the most perfect dependence and trust. This pure, sweet, innocent life which he had saved should be his own ark of refuge now. Passionately he kissed the slightly-parted lips.

"My beautiful—my pure guardian angel! I can defy all the demons of the nethermost shades while you are with me!"

She stirred in her sleep and murmured slightly. Then her hands tightened yet more clingingly upon his, and nestling closer to him she slumbered again. No supernatural terrors could appal him now, no fearful imaginings begotten of cold and darkness. Morbid temperament and crime-laden conscience counted for naught as he sat there in the heart of the wild cliffs at midnight, and the pure, lovely life of her who slumbered so peacefully and confidingly in his arms, was dependent on him for its preservation. Whatever grisly secret those grim waters held, they might keep or divulge; it was powerless to scare him while *her* presence was with him. And so the dark hours wore on, one by one, over the sleeper and over the watcher.

"This way, sir, and mind 'ow you walk. Better let me go fust—if you'll wait 'ere!" said a rough seafaring voice, and then, in a lower tone, as if addressing another person, it went on, "Better keep him 'ere, sir. If we do find the poor young lady in 'ere—well you know, sir, there ain't a ghost of a chance of her being alive."

Lights began to flash in the chasm, feeble and glimmering in contrast with the gigantic ruggedness of its massive walls. Then Roland Dorrien started as if he had been shot. Their time of emancipation had come. She was about to be taken from him, and he must wander forth again. Rapidly he resumed his tinted glasses, which in the uncertain light would suffice to guard against recognition.

"This way!" he called out in a harsh, quavering voice which needed no disguise. "The young lady is perfectly safe, and you will find her here."

Twice that night did these stern cliffs echo a great cry. First, the awful outpouring of a human soul in its last depths of anguish, now a shout of unparalleled joy and thankfulness. The searching party rushed in the direction of the sound, stumbling and nearly falling in their eagerness.

"Here we are. Now, careful," cried Roland. And Olive's half-fainting form was lowered from the ledge which had proved such an ark in the time of need, and placed in her father's arms. The rough fishermen turned away their heads, and honest Jem Pollock's manful attempts to clear his throat resulted in a series of dismal barks, which echoed hideously from the overhanging heights.

"Well, I'm darned!" he said, looking up at the ledge. "Who'd ha' thought such a blessed bit o' good luck? Well, I'm darned—ahum!—beg pardon, Muster Turner," he interjected apologetically, becoming aware of the young curate's presence, right at his elbow.

The first joy of success over, they began to eye the stranger with some curiosity. He stepped forward.

"I fancy the young lady will soon come round," he said in his assumed voice, which grated with an anxious harshness upon the ears of the listeners. "She has been rather frightened, I fear, and is very wet. The sooner you get her between warm blankets the better."

"You have earned for yourself the gratitude and blessing not only of a father but of an entire community, sir," said Turner, extending his hand to him.

"Indeed! How?"

"Why, by saving this young lady's life," went on Turner in surprise. "Anyone can see with half an eye that she could never have reached that place of refuge but for you."

The other smiled sadly.

"I fancy the young lady saved both our lives, since it was she who suggested falling back on this place at all," he replied. "There was no other chance for us, and so I acted on the idea—happily, as it transpired. And now, if I might suggest—she should be taken home as soon as possible."

Leaving reluctantly his recovered child, Dr. Ingelow hurried up.

"God bless you, sir, whoever you may be!" he cried, seizing both the stranger's hands. "Pray do me the favour of making my house your resting-place—you must be wet through and thoroughly tired out—and of allowing me to become further acquainted with one who has rescued my darling child from a terrible death."

The exile's heart thoroughly knew its own bitterness, as he heard once more the true, kindly tones. But it could not be. He would accompany them until they reached the high road, when he would make some excuse, and hasten to fly from the temptation to which he dared not yield. So he consented.

The waves were breaking with a hoarse, sullen boom, as though disappointed of their prey, as the party returned along the beach in the pitchy darkness of the small hours of the winter's morning, and the light of the lanterns shone with a weird gleam upon the receding surf. Olive had been placed in an improvised litter of shawls and wraps slung on to two stout poles which they had brought with them, and was borne by two sturdy fishermen. Exhaustion and the terrors she had gone through had reduced her to a state of semi-unconsciousness, in which her mind was hardly sensible of what went on around her. Her father, still terribly anxious, walked at her side, and the stranger, who evinced no disposition to talk, had taken up his position on the other side—an arrangement not exactly to Turner's taste, who, however, took comfort from the thought that the man was fifty or sixty at least, even though he was well-made and free of step still, and undeniably a gentleman. At last a stray light betokened the vicinity of Wandsborough.

"Now, let me see," mused the stranger. "This is the Battisford road, I believe. Do not think me very rude, Mr.—Ingelow—but on turning things over I find I must unavoidably be back in London to-day. I should have gone up by the night train but for this unfortunate—this fortunate, rather should I call it—walk of mine. On some future occasion, perhaps, I may have the great pleasure of renewing our acquaintance."

"My dear sir, we really cannot allow such a thing," cried the rector, aghast. "You will surely reconsider

this. At any rate, put off your flight for a few hours. It is a long way to Battisford, and we are just home now. You shall be driven over later if you wish it. Now do oblige me——"

All who witnessed it thought they had never seen such a curious look before, as that which came into the other's face. A sharp struggle was going on within him.

"Go back with them—tell them who you are," said the lonely heart of the exile. "You will have friends—a way will be found out of your difficulties somehow, and then what love and peace and happiness will be yours!"

"You—a beggar, penniless, ruined, destitute?" whispered Pride. "You, whose memory is under a cloud, and who are without the barest means of existence—will you go back to accept the charity of those with whom you moved as equal? Only reveal your identity and see how their grateful overtures will cool!"

Said Conscience, "Leave her—assassin. Can red blood-guiltiness and pure white innocence ever mate? Leave her, ere she comes to abhor your name."

And Pride and Conscience triumphed over Heart.

"I greatly fear I must excuse myself for being unable to accept your kind hospitality," he said at last. "But if you will do me one favour, I shall feel thankful to you."

"Certainly. What is it?" said the rector.

"If you will drop me a line to this address once or twice, and let me know how the young lady gets on, it would be a satisfaction to me. I cannot but feel greatly interested in my companion in adversity," replied the stranger, rapidly scribbling on a card, which he handed to Dr. Ingelow.

"Why, most certainly," said the rector, hardly glancing at it. "Most certainly. But——"

He stopped short, gazing blankly into the darkness. The stranger had disappeared.

Roland Dorrien returned to Battisford in the grey winter's morning, and having put together his few possessions at "The Silver Fleece," he left that ancient hostelry for the railway station, to the unfeigned regret of the garrulous waiter, whom even a liberal honorarium

could hardly console for the loss of so congenial a recipient of local gossip. Yet, up to the last moment, he found himself inconsistently cherishing a wild hope that, his identity being cleared up, the rector might come over in post haste to insist upon his return to Wandsborough. But no such summons came, and when he took his seat in a hard, cushionless third-class carriage, down whose rattling windows the pelting rain streamed in torrents, his case was about as hopeless and desperate as the lot of mortal man could well be.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AFTER THE STORM.

HUBERT DORRIEN'S sad fate soon came to be recognised as an accepted fact by Wandsborough and its neighbourhood. He had fallen down Smugglers' Ladder in the dark, for had not young Mr. Ingelow found a bit of the cord of his eye-glass hanging from the brink of that fateful chasm? And his body had been carried away by the tide, as to that there was no doubt. Why, only a fortnight afterwards, the rector's daughter would have lost her life at the same spot, to a dead certainty, had it not been for a stranger, who must have been sent there by Providence, specially for the purpose, said Wandsborough and its neighbourhood. And no sooner had the community arrived at this conclusion than its verdict was confirmed beyond a doubt. The body of the missing man was cast up on the shore a few miles from Wandsborough, and though in a dreadful state after its long immersion, the face was unrecognisable, the clothing, watch, and other possessions of the missing man were not, and the identity thus established, a coroner's jury returned a verdict of "Death by misadventure," and the remains were interred in Cranston churchyard. One juryman, burning with zeal, was anxious to append a rider, censuring the absence of fencing along the dangerous part of the cliffs, but was stifled by the remainder, who were alive to the fact that although part of such fencing would be at the cost of the deceased's father, by far the larger portion would fall upon the rates, i. e. themselves.

Then the gossips began to speculate as to the probable effect of the fatality upon domestic affairs at Cranston Hall. Would it result in a healing of the breach between General Dorrien and his eldest—now his only—son. In its heart of hearts the neighbourhood hoped it would.

Him, at any rate, it knew, and if he was somewhat cold and reticent, he would none the less keep up his position as it should be kept up, an eventuality by no means so certain in the case of poor Hubert, had he been the one to inherit. But if the feud were to run on to the bitter end, the probability was that some stranger, wholly undesirable, would eventually reign at Cranston.

But as time went on, it brought with it no sign of reconciliation. No communication passed between Roland Dorrien and his father, indeed the General was in as complete a state of ignorance on the subject of his son's whereabouts as the most curious of the busybodies who interested themselves in his affairs. In truth, there were times when the old man realised his loneliness and would fain have had the prodigal return, but then it must be unreservedly as a prodigal and not as one with whom terms were to be made, that must be distinctly understood. To be sure, he forgot that his son had inherited his own unyielding nature, but that is just the very thing parents of his type invariably do forget.

Finally, as the prodigal made no sign, he grew more hardened than ever in his resentment. He would not have been unwilling to abandon his cherished idea—to wit, the Cranston-Ardleigh alliance; perhaps, in time, might have brought himself to waive his opposition to the Rectory one, had the exile only approached in an apologetic spirit. In fact, it was one of those rare cases where a judicious friend, having touch of both parties, might have been invaluable. But no advances did the erring one make, conciliatory or otherwise, and the stern old man, sonless and unloved in his old age, grew more morose and reserved every day.

On his wife, the bereavement told with terrible effect. All the love of her hard, yet strong, nature had been poured out upon her youngest-born. He was her Benjamin, and now that he had been taken from her, she felt that it would, indeed, bring down her grey hairs in sorrow to the grave. And what lent tenfold anguish to her bereavement was that she regarded it as an act of the direct vengeance of Heaven. Like all women of her hard, uncompromising opinions, she believed firmly in "judg-

ments"; unlike most of them, however, she did not believe in these applying to her neighbours to the exclusion of herself, and now fully, yet unresignedly, did she admit to herself that her passive acquiescence in, if not indirect attempts at the robbing of her eldest son of his birthright in favour of her idolised younger, had been visited by the signal and direct curse of Heaven. And, perhaps, in one sense she was not altogether wrong, for partiality and favouritism in family life is dangerously likely to breed, at any rate, the spirit of Cain.

Though fully recognising the justice of the visitation, yet, none the less, was she furiously rebellious. She remembered Roland's last words to her as he went forth in anger from his father's roof, words spoken in bitter and wrathful satire. "*Let me congratulate you upon having things at last exactly as you have long wished them to be.*" And now it seemed to her that there was menace in the words. And from that moment she hated her eldest son. Her former want of love now turned to something more positive, and she felt that she fiercely hated him, as in some mysterious degree the cause of his brother's death.

She had not even the poor consolation of once more gazing upon the beloved face, all cold and unresponsive as it would be. Even that was denied her. Ah, but how little had she grieved for that other son when he had gone down beneath the buffeting storms which had so fiercely swept the ocean of his life, how secretly exultant she had been that his birthright had passed to his brother, whom she loved!

All that a daughter could do had Nellie done for her mother at this terrible crisis. Her patience was unbounded, even when her hardest and most unselfish efforts were met with fierce reproaches and ironical taunts. What had she cared for poor Hubert when he was alive, that she should feign grief for him now? Why, if she thought of anyone but herself, it was Roland, to whom everything must give way. At other times the grievance would be that she did not show feeling enough. No one would think that her brother had barely lain a month in his cold grave, to see the cheerful expression of

her face. These and similar reproaches were her daily portion, till at last the poor girl had begun to think she really was without feelings, and if not, that the sooner she became so the better.

But there was an ever-brightening spot on her horizon. Although he had been unable to see her, Eustace Ingelow had made of the catastrophe an opportunity of renewing his vows by letter, and even this was as balm to the girl's empty, aching heart. The rector's son was no half-and-half lover, and in a trice the correspondence had become brisk. Of course his letters were supremely incoherent and foolish effusions, such indeed as would convulse a callous court were they produced in a breach of promise suit, but they were so thoroughly genuine, breathing throughout such a spirit of manly affection and real hopefulness, that poor Nellie took vast comfort, and found herself looking forward to the expiration of the few weeks which should bring the Oxford vacation and the writer in person with a degree of eagerness such as she had never before experienced about anything.

Yes. Eustace was hopeful. That mournful search in which he had borne so active and intrepid a part had, he felt, rendered him yeoman's service. Not only had Nellie's father spoken gratefully to him on that occasion, but he had since received a—for him—very kind letter from the General, expressing appreciation of his energetic aid and true sympathy, and trusting that when he returned to Wandsborough he would do him the favour of calling at Cranston, in order that he might adequately thank him in person, he, the General, having given up visiting for the present.

So Eustace saw light ahead, and being very young and proportionately sanguine, his hopes flew off at a tangent and took in the interests of others besides himself. Who knew but that he might be instrumental in bringing about a reconciliation all round? Perhaps the old General was not such a bad sort at bottom, he reasoned, and if only the "padre" could be got at him, why, he was sure things would come right. Then the next thing would be to find poor, dear old Roland. They could advertise for him, or set some of those private-inquiry fellows on his

track, and find him somehow, and then Olive and himself could have a double-barrelled wedding, and henceforth they would all be as jolly together as jolly could be, more so in fact by contrast with all these wretched rows which had gone before. So reasoned glowing youth, leaving out of account such considerations as that rancorous feud—bitter, burning words, which, once spoken, cannot be forgotten, no, not in a hundred life-times—black misfortune, and hope turned to the gall of despair do not pass over those concerned without leaving terrible traces of their deadly blight, even if the fruit which they have borne be that of ruin and of crime.

But if Eustace left out of sight these reflections, his father did not. The rector smiled sadly to himself as he read his son's sanguine outpourings—sadly, for he speculated how soon and to what extent contact with the hard world would rub off the boy's fresh, wholesome warm-heartedness. Yet one suggestion had fixed his attention, for it bore upon the very plan which he had himself been meditating for some days. It was that he should pay a call of condolence at Cranston. He did not pretend to himself that it was otherwise than distasteful, but it seemed his duty. The Dorriens were not his parishioners, but they were neighbours. They had always treated him with hostility, and on one or two occasions with studied insult; yet they were now sorely afflicted, and for him to allow resentment because of his trifling wrongs to stand in the way at such a time, would be more than unworthy. It was not to be thought of.

So, actuated by these considerations, Dr. Ingelow found himself one afternoon ringing at the great door of Cranston Hall. He noted the stare of surprise which came over the stolid visage of the domestic who opened it, and who in a minute returned to inform him that General and Mrs. Dorrien did not see visitors at present, but that they desired that their compliments should be conveyed to him. A few days later the rector received a note stamped with the Dorrien arms, which he opened with considerable curiosity. Though stiff and formal, it was not uncivil, as in curt phraseology General Dorrien expressed his appreciation of the Rector of Wands-

borough's kindly attention, and indeed that of all other sympathetic inquirers, &c., &c. And the good priest felt that he had done his duty.

But he still had plenty of anxieties, the first and chiefest of which was on Olive's behalf. She had never quite recovered from the effects of that terrible night, and the Wandsborough M.D., together with a great London luminary whom the rector had privily got down to see her, had confessed themselves baffled. At any rate they were clear upon one point. She must have a change; that was imperatively needed, and it must be a thorough one. For a long time she resisted. She did not want to leave Wandsborough, she protested, and why not wait until the summer, when it would be so much pleasanter abroad? But Margaret's diplomacy overruled all these objections, and it was decided they should leave for the south of Spain almost immediately.

On one point Olive's lips were sealed. No word passed them as to the identity of the mysterious stranger. Her lover had more than hinted at some terrible shadow overhanging him, apart from his ruined prospects. Her quick intellect put two and two together. His disguise must have been assumed with no light object, and with no living soul, not even her own father, would she share the key to the mystery. But she lost no time in despatching to the address which he had left, such a letter as should ensure her against losing sight of him again, repeating, as it did, all—and more than all—her assurances to him during that last meeting on the lone sea shore; breathing a world of comfort and hopefulness and love.

CHAPTER XXXV.

REDIVIVUS.

AGAIN we must ask the reader to stand with us in the cheerful dining-room within which he obtained his first introduction to Cranston Hall. Now, as then, the breakfast-table looks bright and inviting, as its owner sits at it, opening his letters with a grave, serious face; but now, unlike then, no warm summer sunshine searches out every corner of the floor, for the sky is thickly overcast, and tossing eddies of snowflakes are whirling past, and powdering with a sugary carpet the half-frozen lawn. Nor do the clustering roses softly beat their bruised fragrance against the window-panes; in their stead only bare branches, tossing in the wintry wind which, dismally whistling round the corners of the house, enhances the snugness of the cosy room, with its blazing fire, whence reflects a sparkling glow upon the breakfast-things and the snowy cloth.

And he who now sits at the table is not him whom we first saw there, for this is a much younger man. Time, which brought its rude buffets, has at length brought its compensations, and Roland Dorrien now reigns in the halls of his ancestors. Let us look at him as he sits there. A little thinner perhaps, certainly graver, and with a brow never quite free from an expression of anxious care; there is an occasional thread of grey in his dark hair, and in the deep blue eyes may be descried a tinge of sadness which is seldom absent. He has aged, too, in appearance, and that greatly; yet barely two years have gone over his head since the night the mysterious stranger altered the hands of the old clock standing in the hall of "The Silver Fleece Inn" at Battisford.

General Dorrien is dead—has lain in Cranston churchyard a year and a half—and his son reigns in his stead.

But whatever our opinion of the deceased Squire of Cranston, the important part he has played in our story

entitles him to something more than the above brief obituary. One evening at the period named, the General failed to return home, whereas it was his wont to appear punctually at the dressing bell. His wife, astonished at this deviation from his rigidly unchanging habits, grew alarmed. The dinner-bell rang—still the General did not appear. Then inquiry elicited that he had been last seen by one of the under-gardeners strolling near the ornamental water, it might have been an hour ago. No, the man noticed nothing strange about his master, who seemed quite well, if anything, rather cheerful. Thoroughly alarmed now, Mrs. Dorrien collected the gardeners and proceeded to the spot where her husband had last been seen. It was, as the man had stated, close to the lake—being, in fact, barely thirty yards distant therefrom. While directing the men to scatter and proceed through the shrubbery in search of their master, Mrs. Dorrien's eye fell upon an object floating in the water, and the sight well-nigh deprived her of speech and power. In response to her signs as she sank down half-fainting, the men pushed off the boat and quickly returned with the General's cane. That was enough. All hope was at an end. But a few minutes more and the body of the missing Squire was found, lying in barely four feet of water. Suicide? No. The medical examination proved that the deceased had been suddenly seized with a fit while standing on the brink of the pool, and had fallen in.

Those who knew the family legend were now more awe-struck than they chose to admit. Within a few months of each other, two more Dorriens had miserably perished—alone, unseen, *and by the agency of water.* Of a truth there was something in the prophecy. When the exile, in response to an urgent advertisement for the late Squire of Cranston's missing son, presented himself at the offices of Messrs. Swan & Simcox, solicitors, Furnival's Inn, and having duly satisfied those gentlemen as to his identity, was informed that General Dorrien had died suddenly, and that every search having been made for his will without avail, he, the applicant—who, as he stood there, could not have put down two shillings and a sixpence if his life depended on it—was heir-at-law to the splendid estate of

Cranston with its dependency, Minchkil Down, &c., &c., and all personal property besides, the deceased having died intestate, it struck those respected practitioners, Messrs. Swan & Simcox, that this new client was a very extraordinary sort of man indeed. For he had sunk into a chair muttering something about "too late," and turning ghastly white, till they became quite alarmed on his account. However, good news does not kill, and the first shock over, Roland Dorrien, without any fuss, quietly, and as if he had never left it, entered upon his own.

Yet when this happened his affairs were in a very desperate condition indeed. For months after his terrible experience with Olive Ingelow on the tide-swept coast he had supported himself by sheer physical labour, more by way of forcing his mind to forget, than with the desire of prolonging his wretched existence, for he had now no longer the means of leaving the country. This could not last long. To a man of his temperament there was but one end—mental prostration, with its dire result, the lunatic asylum or the suicide's grave. And from this his father's death had befallen just—but only just—in time to save him.

How it was that General Dorrien should not only have allowed his unforgiven son to succeed him, but also, by dying intestate, have left his wife and Nellie almost entirely dependent upon that son's bounty, is one of those mysteries that will never be solved in this world. His wife had a small income of her own, but out of the estate she could not touch a penny otherwise than as a free gift from Roland. And this she positively refused to do—and persevered in her refusal.

Greatly did the family solicitors puzzle over the non-transpiration of any will. They were aware of the quarrel between the General and his son, and that the former should die without testamentary instructions was not quite satisfactory. At first they suspected that there was a will, but that it had somehow got lost, but when after a most careful search it was not forthcoming, then their suspicions took the direction of foul play, in which, however, they acquitted the heir-at-law of any complicity.

And the said heir-at-law shared their suspicions, though

he breathed no word of it to them or to any other living ear. But no precaution would he neglect to render secure to himself that which he regarded as rightfully his own, and which had come to him, if by chance, yet at the most fortunate of times. If it should transpire that others had the legal right, at any rate he had the moral right, and it should not be his fault if he did not keep it. So the first thing he did upon entering on possession was to institute a most thorough and exhaustive search for the missing document on his own account. He would ensure the safety of his position once and for all, and leave nothing to chance. So for several nights, when no living eye could behold him, did he remain up till early dawn, carrying on his search. Not a desk or a drawer was left unrifled, not an article of furniture unmoved. Even the very walls he carefully sounded for hollow places and sliding panels, and more than one escritoire suspected of secret drawers did he hew in pieces with his own hand, alone and with locked doors. Once, indeed, his breath came thick and his heart stood still as he lit upon a bundle of legal-looking parchments in one of these forgotten recesses. But they were only records of a private and delicate transaction of his father's early life, and with a sigh of relief he burnt them to ashes. Had one of them been the genuine document, which was to dispossess him, it would have shared the fate of the rest. No scruples would have stayed his hand. He had drained the cup of poverty and destitution to the very dregs; but the tide had turned at last. What he had got he meant to keep, at all and every hazard.

But that was a year and a half ago, and now here he sits opening his letters. A frown comes over his face as his eye falls upon the address of one of them, and with a couple of impatient tugs at his moustache he chucks the obnoxious missive aside. Then a light step is heard in the passage and his brow clears. There is a place laid opposite his, and behind the urn, evidently awaiting its occupant. Surely that is she outside. Who is it? His sister, Nellie?

Then the door opens, and enter—not Nellie, but Olive. No longer Olive Ingelow, however, for it is rather over a

year ago that she changed it, and never in all his priestly experience had the rector of Wandsborough pronounced the blessing of his Church upon a happier union than these the nuptials of his best-loved child have up till now proved.

Olive's happiness suits her well, for she is looking lovelier than ever, and seems to bring a ray of sunshine in with her this biting, tempestuous winter morning. She seems, too, to have recovered a large portion of her old irresistible spirits, though the sparkling piquancy of the beautiful girl whom we first saw in Wandsborough church has given way to the more thoughtful sweetness of the woman who has passed to her happiness through the dark days of trial and affliction. Her husband is wont sportively to tell her that she is fast acquiring the staidness of the conventional British matron—an imputation which she makes believe greatly to resent. But Roland Dorrien's love and adoration of his beautiful wife is as warm to-day as it was when they stood together two years ago beneath the cliffs, in the dim gloaming, with the spray dashing in their faces as they watched the huge waves thundering in, and knew that in another hour they would be lying dead in each other's embrace.

She goes across to him now and puts her arm round his neck and lays her cheek against his.

"What is it, dear? Any bad news? No. Only those stupid old business letters," she says, looking over his shoulder. "Put them away till later and don't let them bore you. But just look how it's snowing. You won't be able to shoot to-day."

"No, I shan't. But it doesn't really matter—Marsland won't care—and I asked the Colonel, but I believe the good old chap will be only too glad of the excuse to sit quietly at home. Tom Barnes will be rather sold, I'm afraid—but we can give him a shoot at any time."

"Of course. And now we'll have a snug day together, all to ourselves—won't we?"

"Olive, darling, I can't help thinking sometimes you must be dull here, shut up all the year round with such a cross-grained animal as this," he says, after a minute's pause. "It must be such a contrast as compared with the jolly days at the old Rectory. Now confess."

"I'll confess this much—that if you don't get that idea out of your wise old head, I shall begin to have a bad opinion of you," she replies affectionately. "Why, I can run over at any moment and look them up, or get them up here, as in fact I'm always doing. What more can you think I want? Now let's see what the arbiter of Fate has brought forth," continues she, going round to her place. "Two bills—that's your department. Letters—only one, and that from Eusty. His regiment has been ordered to India—wonder how Nellie will like that—and he is coming down here the week after next. He will be here in time for the festival."

"That's a goodish bit of news. Will he come to us or to the Rectory first?"

"Don't know. That'll have to be decided."

"By the way, where's Roy?" he asks suddenly. "He hasn't been in this morning. Ah, there he is."

For the servant entering with a tray has also admitted our woolly friend, who makes for his master and thrusts his nose into his hand with an affectionate whine, his brush wagging like a flail.

Roy, too, is restored to his rightful place in society, as his master puts it. One of the first things Roland did when the tide of his misfortunes turned, was to take steps for the recovery of his faithful follower, and Roy's new owner, who was a good-hearted fellow, had refused the somewhat extravagant sum which was offered him for his purchase, and had handed him back at the same price. Roy's exuberant glee on his restoration to his old master was something indescribable. But now he has long been an institution in the Cranston household and is a favourite with everyone, except Johnston, the head gardener, of whom more anon.

The airy mood of the new Squire of Cranston fades as suddenly as it arose. He eyes for a moment the unwelcome missive which he has cast aside, then, as if with an effort, he tears it open. It is only a letter from his mother.

"Oh! What is it, darling?" cries Olive anxiously, half starting up. For with a furious imprecation Roland has dashed down the open sheet upon the table, and sits back in his chair, his face ashy white.

Only a couple of lines does this letter contain, and they are in his mother's handwriting.

"*Since you force me to speak plainly, I will—I can hold no communication with a murderer—a fratricide.*"

"Roland, tell me what it is. Tell me, darling, and let me share it with you," urges Olive pleadingly. "What cruel thing does she say?"

His hand is trembling as it heavily lies upon the open paper, as if to blot out the accusing words.

"Nothing but what is evil and ill-conditioned," he answers hoarsely. "See what comes of doing the right thing. It's only her reply to that letter of mine offering to make a settlement upon her. This is the fifth time I've done it, and each time I get more abused than before. One's mother!"

Oh, the biting satire in the last two words. Roland Dorrien has never seen his mother since the day he passed her in anger on the stairs. There had been no affection between them at any time, and now he would not pretend to any. But he had his code of honour, and under this he would willingly have made a liberal settlement upon her out of the estate. Mrs. Dorrien, however, refused to touch a penny—and went further. She rejected his overtures with scorn and even reproach. An idea had rooted itself in her mind that he was responsible for his younger brother's death—that he had made away with him, in short, for his own advantage. It was the merest fancy, wholly destitute of the slightest clue, but it took firmer and firmer hold upon her till she was convinced of its truth, as though she had beheld with her own eyes that terrible scene on the cliff. But she had never gone so far as to put her suspicion into words until now, when, in an access of fierce grief for the lost, and fury against those who had benefited by her bereavement, she had penned those fearful words.

"I won't let you leave me while you are like this," pleads Olive tenderly, with her arm on his shoulder. He had been gathering up his letters to go, a move which she was determined to circumvent. "Whatever it is, remember nothing can separate us now."

He almost shudders at her words. Can it not? he thinks.

Yes, but it can—and in a manner so grisly and awful as she would never dream of suspecting. His brain is in a whirl. What could have set his mother's suspicions to work? Even though they could have no foundation to go upon, a fixed idea like that, in such a mind as hers, might be in the highest degree dangerous.

"I must go," he answers. "But, my darling, I promise to come back to you here in half an hour. Will that do?"

She is satisfied. A clinging kiss, and then she stands gazing after the tall, fine figure in its shooting-suit of light homespun. She sees him enter the study—his father's study that was—and hears the snap of the key in the lock, then, turning to the window, she stands looking thoughtfully and with a troubled expression out upon the whirling snowflakes and the white, cold earth, in contrast whereto the dark trunks and gaunt limbs of the trees in the park show out like starved spectres, and the dismal howling of the wintry blast is as the warning voice of impending woe.

Amid the joys which encompass Olive Dorrien's married life there is yet room for one great sorrow. Over her husband's peace there hangs some dark and terrible secret, the weight of which he must bear alone.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE SWORD.

ALTHOUGH the neighbourhood had by this time got thoroughly accustomed to the new state of things at Cranston, and had voted it a great improvement on the old, yet the said vicinity was unanimous in its opinion that the General's successor was decidedly queer.

True, a man in his position should be popular and not eccentric, but then, there were extenuating circumstances. If the county was not so much entertained at Cranston Hall as it deemed it had a right to expect, at any rate open house was kept periodically; and, as all things are relative, the contrast between even this and the inhospitality which characterised the late General's tenure, told to tenfold advantage. Another claim had Roland Dorrien upon the indulgence of the neighbourhood. He had taken his wife from among the daughters of the land. No stranger to them and theirs had he brought into their midst, but one whom they had seen grow up among them, and right nobly did she grace her far from unimportant, and at first rather trying, position. So, taking all things into account, the neighbourhood was inclined to congratulate itself on the acquisition of a new lord for Cranston, and to look with indulgent eyes upon his moods and vagaries.

And these were multifold. Though not of a hilarious disposition, yet there were times when he would yield himself up to the excitement of the hour with an unthinking *abandon* which made even the youngest and liveliest of his guests stare, and then, while they were wondering with an agreeable surprise how it was that they had never suspected Dorrien of having so much in him, the mercury would fall with alarming suddenness, and he would relapse into a moody taciturnity, for which there was no accounting. Sometimes, too, those staying at Cranston never

saw their host for days at a time, except at meals, and these he seemed to get through in a half-absent kind of way, answering in monosyllables if appealed to, but never originating a remark. In his normal frame of mind, however, Roland Dorrien struck his acquaintance as somewhat cold and uncomfortably reticent, but as a peculiarly keen-witted and observant man.

For a long time he had steadfastly refused to be placed on the Commission of the Peace, and his old friend, Colonel Neville, had waxed very sore and disappointed thereat. For Dorrien of Cranston not to have his place among the judicial luminaries adorning the Wandsborough Bench was, in the gallant veteran's eyes, a thing simply unheard of in the annals of the county. Why, it was tantamount to a prediction of the family downfall. But Roland had stood firm, and the Colonel had taken the matter quite seriously to heart. Then all of a sudden, just as his friends had given up trying to persuade him, he had, of his own accord, expressed his willingness to serve, and the Colonel was overjoyed. But from the day of his appointment up till now he had only taken his seat on the bench three times, and then, either by accident or design, when there was a peculiarly light list of cases for adjudication. Moreover, his voice had been strenuously raised on the side of mercy, to the no small astonishment of those who had ever been wont to look upon his name as a convertible term for unbending severity. "A hard Dorrien" was how inferiors and dependents had been wont to speak of the heads of the family.

"I don't think it exactly my line in life," he observed to Mr. Curtis, the vicar of Cranston, in reply to that worthy's expostulation with him for his scant attendance at Petty Sessions, "to sit in judgment on a lot of poor devils who knock over a rabbit when they're half-starving. It doesn't seem a very ennobling kind of office to fill, does it?"

"That's all very well, Mr. Dorrien," had replied the vicar, who was a zealous attendant at the Wandsborough Bench, and not a little proud of his connection therewith. "But birth and station have their duties, you must remember, and if those who by virtue of these advantages

are appointed to 'execute justice and maintain truth' shrink from their responsibilities, why, it will soon be a bad thing for the country. For what is the country to do?"

"Pay some fellow—one of the Great Unbriefed, for instance—to perform these onerous duties," was the reply, with a careless laugh, not wholly free from satire. "Plenty of sharp fellows in these hard times would jump at the billet, any one of whom would be quite as competent as we are collectively to fine Bill Gubbins ten shillings and costs for driving a horse and cart down the street when drunk and incapable, or to decide whether John Hodge or Tom Podge shall be adjudged to contribute towards the maintenance of Sarah Timms' latest hopeful. At any rate it doesn't strike me that the discharge of these elevating duties should be monopolised by 'birth and station.'"

To which the vicar, a fine, hard-headed Tory of the old school, had replied severely, that he feared his friend had become imbued with some of the Radical tendencies of the day.

Roland's eccentricities, too, had their religious side. For weeks he would never go near a church, then he would rise in the dark, three or four times a week, mount his horse and ride over to the morning office at Wandsborough church, and the little congregation assembled in the side chapel, whose gloom was hardly dispersed by the altar tapers' soft glow, while the rain poured down upon the roof, would be astonished by a tall figure, gaitered and mud-besplashed, suddenly arriving in its midst, perhaps, just as Dr. Ingelow and his acolyte were reciting the Nicene Creed. On the subject of these pilgrimages he let drop no word to anybody, not even to his wife, turning the conversation if she alluded to them; and this, with ready tact, after the first time, she never did, in having recorded which fact, by the way, we have testified volumes to Olive's advantage. Nevertheless, she rejoiced with a great secret joy. But Wandsborough regarded these proceedings on the part of the Squire of Cranston with undivided curiosity, but diverse feelings, and the advanced Anglicans congratulated themselves mightily on the acquisition of so influential and important a convert.

Various theories, too, were advanced to account for Roland Dorrien's eccentricities. Some went so far as darkly to whisper that there was madness in the family. There was the late General, for instance. Look how he shut himself up and never entertained, and was always gloomy and morose, and quarrelled with everybody, his own flesh and blood included. Then, to go further back, there was the General's brother, the former Squire, an old bachelor and most queer in his ways. And now this one—at his age, and in his fortunate circumstances, a man ought not to look and act as if life was one great and protracted mistake. A few, more charitably disposed and more superstitious withal, scouted the mania theory, but declared that the present race of Dorriens must be under a curse. At any rate, it was not a little singular that two out of the three sons had met with an untimely and tragical death, and now, no doubt, the thought of it preyed upon the mind of the surviving one. But whatever it was, it must be a very serious thing, for there could be few more enviable positions and calculated to produce happiness, as the world understands it, than that of Dorrien of Cranston. On this point the neighbourhood was thoroughly agreed.

And the neighbourhood, looking at things from its own light, argued rightly. In the full health and vigour of his manhood, possessed of one of the most beautiful seats in England, its splendid domain absolutely unencumbered, a lovely wife, who adored him—if there is such a thing as happiness in the world, assuredly Roland Dorrien should have been a happy man. Yet he was not.

As we have seen, no compunction followed upon his crime—no remorse—no fear of detection and of the awful penalty which, in the event of detention, he would be called upon to pay. He was then so overwhelmed beneath the blows of Fate, that one more or less could make no difference in the wretched hopelessness of his lot. His conscience was seared past all feeling.

Then had come the change, and from a living death a single day had sufficed to restore him to the joys of life in more than all their fulness—their sweetness, beyond measure, enhanced by the black period which had gone

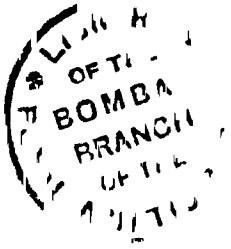
before. He had stretched forth his hand and grasped them, he had hastened to pluck for his own this fair flower which had languished and grown beyond his reach, and in gathering it he had filled, as he thought, his cup of bliss to the very brim. Secure in the love of his beautiful wife, prosperous in his splendid possessions, what could this one crime of a troublous past avail against him?

But with prosperity his heart grew soft again, and with it the voice of compunction made itself heard—at first, but faintly, and only at long intervals. Then, little by little, the haunting vision of a face in its agony of death-terror stole across the unclouded brightness of his life, and Time, which in its course blurs over all recollections as it rolls on, only served to bring out this one more vividly. In the dead of night would that face be staring at him, in the golden hours of the bright and peaceful day, that awful, agonised gasp would sound in his ears as he heard it on the brink of the abyss; and as the horror of this ever-brooding cloud across his sunshine swept full upon him with a weird and supernatural, yet none the less real a consciousness, a dejection settled down upon his mind, which, if allowed to grow apace, might end in the most disastrous of results.

And Olive—did she ever regret the step which had linked her lot to his, burdened as it was with a secret grief in which she had no share? Never, for the fraction of a moment. Always brave, loving, and patient, she strove to lighten his load. Even when suffering from a temporary depression of spirits herself, she would brace herself with an effort and cast care away in order that she might cheer him. She studied his moods, and when in her clear-sightedness she saw the dark hour about to come upon him, any sacrifice of her own comfort and convenience did she deem of small account if only she could keep up his spirits and lift him out of himself. And she had her reward. Never was he so happy as when alone with her—and as amid the night horrors of the fatal cave, with the wild waters surging around them, he had found refuge in her slumbering innocence and purity from the supernatural terrors which came crowding in, thick and fast, upon his soul, so now, in his dark and conscience-

stricken moods, hers was the image that caused the evil spirit to fly; her tones, the music that rendered his ears deaf to the accusing voice; hers the protecting presence, beneath the weight of the ever-threatening cloud which he felt would sooner or later descend upon him and overwhelm him in his doom.

Yet why should it? No human eye witnessed that moonlight tragedy. Already the circumstances had faded into past history; nor at the time had any suspicion of violence arisen to fix people's memory. But for all that, Roland was as firmly convinced that sooner or later the reckoning would overtake him, as that he himself was a living man, and when it did, he had little enough doubt as to the issue. And now, as we see him once more after two years, that crisis seems to him within measurable distance.



CHAPTER XXXVII.

EUSTACE OUTFLANKED.

General Dorrien's widow occupied a semi-detached villa in Maida Vale. She had, as we have seen, persistently and even fiercely refused her son's repeated offers of a settlement, liberal and freely made as they were, preferring to live on her own not very ample means to accepting a penny from him whom, without a shred of evidence to justify her in the idea, she persisted in regarding as responsible for his brother's death. The difference in her mode of living was a trifle, she declared. At Cranston, they had always lived very quietly, so it was in no sense a "come-down." Poor Nellie, however, had felt the change acutely, and although she tried dutifully to make the best of it, the exclusive society of a gloomy parent told upon her spirits, and the smoke-defiled air of suburban London was a poor substitute for the strong ozone of the sea. Consequently, the girl became seriously ailing, and there was nothing for it but to send her away for a change.

It was some time, however, before the widow would allow her to accept Roland's invitation, and it was not until he threatened to go in person and bring her away by force that her mother, whom misfortune had not rendered one whit less selfish and exacting, reluctantly gave way. So Nellie returned for a long stay at her old home, and was made much of by her brother and his wife, under which bright auspices her spirits came back like magic, and day after day she wondered the more how they could all find themselves so thoroughly happy where, before, gloom and restraint, jars and wrangles, had been the order of the day. Why, she could hardly believe it was Cranston, and Olive's warning had weight—that she must not get well and strong too quickly, or her mother would be wanting her back again.

And this warning was very urgently seconded by a certain recently-gazetted subaltern, who seemed to divide the time of his leave exclusively between the Rectory and Cranston Hall, the latter receiving by far the lion's share. In short, Eustace made the most of his opportunities, to the satisfaction of both parties. There was a third party to be reckoned with, though, and one into whose scheme satisfaction did not enter. This was Nellie's mother.

The widow was furious when the subject was broached to her. Never as long as she lived would she listen to any such preposterous idea. The very name of Ingelow was repulsive to her; had not that detestable family wrought mischief—not to say crime—enough? Poor Nellie was ordered home at once; and, not content with giving Roland a most unambiguous bit of her mind, Mrs. Dorrien, sen., extended the attention to Dr. Ingelow, who for his part consigned the vituperative document to the flames, mostly unread. But Roland, chucking his jobation across the table to Olive, laughed sneeringly at the pious quotations, alternating line by line with vehement abuse.

"Ha-ha! Honour our parents, indeed! No, no. That string's played through, Mrs. General Dorrien."

He was for keeping Nellie at Cranston altogether, but apart from the objections of the girl herself—who, in spite of everything, refused to leave her mother, now that the latter was all alone—the rector strongly objected to his son being a party to such desertion. They must wait and have patience. It was only a question of time, and both were young. A little self-denial and consideration, even for one bitterly hostile, would do them no harm—in fact, they could not but be the gainers by it in the long run. Thus the good old man. But his son-in-law was not of this way of thinking; however, he yielded the point.

Then Eustace, deserted by his supports, resolved upon a bold venture—nothing less than an advance upon the enemy's camp under cover of a flag of truce. The widow received him, but to the end of his life the youthful warrior was sure he would retain a very lively recollection of the interview, though a confused idea of what was said in the course thereof. As he remarked to his sister, Sophie, when reporting progress—

"Sweet relative—future mamma-in-law! Blackguarded a fellow without a break for twenty-five minutes by the clock, and then, before he could get in a word edgeways, turfed him out into the street. Take my word for it, Sophonisba, my jewel, I wouldn't tackle that same ancient and formidable party again—no, not for all the V.C.'s ever struck."

Left to her retirement, the General's widow did two things, neither of which tended to her own peace of mind nor to the happiness of her daughter. She went in strongly for the Gospel according to Calvin, and she cherished and fed her grief for the loss of her idolised son. Her crapes were as heavy as in the first month of her widowhood, and no little awe did the stern and gloomy countenance, and the tall figure swathed in deepest black, inspire among the elect of the flock shepherded by the noted evangelical luminary whom Mrs. Dorrien had elected to "sit under." She lived alone with her daughter, visiting, and being visited by, nobody, in order that she might more freely brood and indulge her grief. She suffered terrible anguish at times, yet looked upon her loss in the light of a judgment, and while admitting the justice of it as concerning herself, yet none the less luridly did her resentment burn against him whom, rightly or wrongly, she regarded as its instrument.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"GIVE ME YOUR CONFIDENCE."

It was Monday morning, and a bright and beautiful day. Three people sat at breakfast at Cranston Hall, the third being Frank Marsland, Roy's quondam purchaser. The wintry sun shone brilliantly in a cloudless sky, though without power, for the hard frost lay in silvery patches, wholly unaffected by his searching beams.

"Do you feel like skating to-day, Marsland?" said Roland, breaking off from the dicussion of a grand festival service they had attended at Wandsborough Church the night before, and as to the detail of which the guest had been seeking information from Olive.

"I should think so. Ice good, eh, Dorrien?"

"First rate. I had it flooded last night, and it'll be like glass."

A sound of voices in the hall, then the door opened without ceremony, and there entered Eustace and his youngest sister, each armed with a pair of skates.

"Salve! All hail, Macbeth! Glorificamus, all round!" cried the former. "Roland, old chap, you don't seem quite the thing. In the words of the poet, you look decidedly 'chippy.'"

"Enough to make one, you ruffian, to have a cyclone like yourself bursting upon one's quiet breakfast-room without any warning.'

"Haw! haw! Coffee, yes, decidedly. Breakfast? no—emphatically," cried Eustace, running two replies into one. "And, Olive, I must say, it's disgraceful of you, reared in the sweet seclusion of a virtuous rectory, only just sitting down to breakfast at ten o'clock. Disgraceful, I repeat."

"Oh, Eusty, in the words of the poet—shut up!" laughed Olive. "Mr. Marsland, I don't think you've met my sister?" And she introduced them. Sophie had grown

up a very pretty girl. Her vivacity, however, was dashed with a tinge of shyness in the company of strangers, which was rather "fetching." Now she looked very engaging in her furry winter costume, her bright face sparkling with animation, and crowned by a becoming arrangement of golden hair. Marsland's somewhat susceptible heart was impressed.

"No. But I think we should have broken the ice, anyhow, Mrs. Dorrien," he answered with a laugh.

"Break the ice? No you don't," cried the irrepressible Eustace. "At least not till this evening, when we flood it. And now, look sharp and finish the oats, good people, for we've come to pick you up, and Spelder Fields is over two miles off."

"All right. I'll send and order the waggonette," said Roland, getting up.

"Waggonette be hanged!" was the ceremonious rejoinder. "We are going to ride Shanks His Mare. And I tell you what, Roland, you lazy dog, you had better do ditto. Some leg work, this gorgeous morning, will do you all the good in the world. Quite set you up again," he grinned, with a wink at Marsland.

"Set me up, eh? But I turned in before you did!"

"Did he, Olive? No, I won't bet. I'll have no chance against your combined perjuries. But Roland, why didn't you turn up at our place last night and feed, instead of sneaking off home. The dad was expecting you. He wanted to run you against that great gun, Hurrell, the padre who held forth. Wasn't *he* lively, eh?"

"Eusty, you irreverent boy, don't talk shop," said Olive impatiently.

"All serene. We had a regular sacerdotal feed though, with the dad in the chair and Margaret in the vice-chair. Concerning whom, old Crustibore, the ex-archdeacon of Seringapatam, who's stone deaf and takes snuff, remarked to his neighbour in a strident stage-whisper what a young-looking woman 'Mrs. Ingelow' was, to be the mother of that dashing fellow opposite. I thought the dad would have choked. As for me I roared outright, but I took care to look in another direction, so it didn't matter."

"It wasn't 'dashing fellow' at all, Olive," struck in

Sophie. "What Dr. Crustibore really said was 'that lanky rascal.'"

All shouted, except Eustace, who affected to regard the interruption as unworthy of notice.

"Yes," he went on. "It's a pity you weren't there to keep Sophie in order. She behaved disgracefully, the more so that 'great was the company of the preachers.'"

"Ah! I've been waiting for that quotation," cried Sophie, sharp as a needle. "Olive, he made use of it about twenty times last night—went all round the room planting it everywhere. I heard it myself at least ten times, and knowing Eusty as we do, it's safe to put the total figure at twenty. And now he's transplanted it here. I knew he would. Dragged it in by the head and shoulders, too—literally."

"Twenty times! Say a hundred while you're about it."

"It was twenty at least. Why, Margaret heard him three times, and scowled at him for a profane person."

"Who hadn't got any 'birthright' to sell," cut in Eustace. "But you should have heard that child. She got in among a knot of those doleful chaps, all neck and spectacles, regular gargoyles, you know, and played the very mischief. You know that lank chap, Berriman, who brought out those asinine articles on celibacy. Well, she soon worked round to that topic, and made of it a peg whereon to hang such a jobation, that they stared at her in horrified amaze, and scattered as if a shell had dropped in among them. You see, she spoke feelingly. That sort of doctrine tends to spoil trade."

"Pooh! None of your gargoyles for me," laughed Sophie.

"No. Nothing less than a gay Hussar will suit her," rejoined Eustace. "There are two in the regiment that'll be just the thing—both much of a muchness. I'm going to bring them over next time I get leave, and then, O Sophonisba, my child, you can smile on the survivor."

"No," retorted the girl mischievously. "I don't like soldiers—cavalrymen least of all. Civilians are much nicer. Look at Roland, for instance. He doesn't tire one with a lot of third-hand chaff."

"Oh, come! I say, Olive, do you allow that?" cried the

irrepressible subaltern. "In view of the approximate passing of the Deceased Wife's Sister's Bill, I call upon you to quell such sentiments, and to repudiate their enunciator —trix, rather."

The ice at Spelder Fields was in fine order. It was a large, flooded meadow on one of the Cranston farms, and although the Squire could have kept it closed to the public, that course would have roused such an amount of ill-feeling as to render the experiment not worth while, for it had been used from time immemorial. It was the rule, however, that anything tending to spoil the ice should be rigorously excluded, and slides were strictly taboo, while any approach to yahooism was promptly nipped in the bud. As the townspeople could not turn out till evening, during the daytime the privileged few had things all their own way.

We shall not, however, follow our party throughout the day. Be it briefly recorded, however, that Marsland surrendered at discretion to Sophie's blue eyes and golden hair, and fresh, bewitching ways, and constituted himself her guide, philosopher and friend, and fetch-and-carry generally, through the uncertain and mazy evolutions of the ice—and how Eustace poured out the vials of his exuberant chaff upon them and upon everybody, and notably upon a brace of shaven and spectacled young clerics, who rather fancied themselves on skates, and, with singular unanimity of intent, were bent on imbuing Sophie with the same idea, but that our friend Marsland sailed in and cut out the prize from under their guns, apparently with the full approval of the prize itself.

"Time to knock off and give King Mob his innings," cried Roland, whirling up to the bank and casting himself thereon.

"Oh, hang it, old man! Isn't it rather soon?" objected Marsland, who, hand-in-hand with a certain blue-eyed young lady, glided by just in time to catch the suggestion.

"Rather soon! I should think it was!" echoed Sophie.

"I think Mr. Dorrien's right," said Clara Neville, who had just been taking a turn or two round the ice with the first speaker. "It's disagreeable being here when the place is full of rough people. Besides, it's getting late."

Ill-natured friends were wont to whisper that the fair Clara was getting somewhat *passée* and soured, and that the qualifications of the future aspirant to Ardleigh Court would not be so narrowly scrutinised now as of yore. But the answer to this libel was that she had refused two very good offers and one indifferent one. Her sister, Maud, was married, and Clara was left alone in the ancestral halls. And now she had made up her mind to smile favourably on Frank Marsland, who had on a former occasion or two begun to show her attention, when again that detestable Rectory furnished a thorn for her side. That chit of a girl had upset the plan, even as her sister had done years before. Poor Clara had not enjoyed her day.

"Er—Dorrien—if you don't mind, I think we—er—I—will have half an hour more of it," stammered Marsland. "Miss Sophie says she'd rather walk back—er—and I'll see her safe home."

"All right, Marsland," replied his host. "Olive dear, do you mind driving back without me? You can take Margaret in the waggonette." He had taken off his skates, and was standing with one foot on the step of the vehicle, wherein sat his wife, wrapped in furs, and looking very sweet in the crisp, frosty air. "Your father and I are going to walk. Oh, and by the way, he says they all can go straight back with us to dinner, so you'd better go on ahead and arrange accordingly."

"Very well, dear. But I quite envy you your lovely walk."

"Not a few quite envy me my lovely something else," he replied meaningly.

"What? Oh, you dear old goose!" she laughed, blushing at the delicate compliment, her dark eyes flashing at him a bright glance of affection. "Now go and find Margaret—there she is, just coming off the ice—and then we'll go."

"Well, Roland, my boy, this sort of thing makes a man feel young again," said the rector, as they began to step out briskly on their homeward way. The sun had gone down, and the bare trees stood against the cloudless sky in delicate tracery, as in a steel engraving. The dead leaves crackled underfoot, and behind them the ring of the

skates on the ice, and the voices and laughter of the skaters grew fainter and fainter.

"I suppose it does," answered the other shortly, with a glance around as if to make sure that no one was within earshot. Then after a pause—

"Look. From where we now stand, it will take us the best part of an hour to walk home—I can call it home now—and the Hall is nearly in the centre of the estate. Well, all this I gave up of my own free will—flung it away with both hands. For what? For love. But even that which I had bought at the price of my birthright, was snatched from me not many hours after its purchase, for the very day after I had done this I learned that I was a ruined man."

"My dear boy, I can never blame myself enough for my short-sightedness in that wretched business," cried the old man in a distressed voice, letting his hand fall affectionately on the other's shoulder.

"There is no question of blame in the matter," went on Roland, speaking quickly and decisively. "And now, do you ever regret that things turned out as they did? Have you ever had during this year and a half which has passed since you gave Olive to me—any reason for misgivings as to her future?"

"Never, Roland—never! Not for a moment! You have been as a dear son to me, and my other children look upon you as a brother, indeed."

Again there was a pause. The rector, understanding well that these questions were leading to something, refrained from interposing.

"Well—now I ask—could anything that might happen—that might come to light, rather—cause you to entertain such misgivings now?"

It was the rector's turn to hesitate. Whither was the conversation drifting? His mind reverted to the rumours current in Wandsborough shortly after Roland's disappearance, and his brow slightly clouded. Before he could reply Roland struck in.

"I know what you are thinking of. I solemnly assure you again, that those rumours were absolutely false. Whatever might happen would affect myself alone. On Olive's account you need feel no anxiety whatever."

"That is all I was hesitating about, Roland. And now, my dear boy, if you feel that you can give me your confidence, it may be that you will have no cause to regret it."

The younger man made no immediate reply. If ever there were time and place for confidence, it was here, in the sweet and peaceful quiet of the evening, the moonlight sleeping upon the hill and the bare, leafless woods lying still and ghostly against the slopes. That confidence he was resolved to make at all costs. No longer could he bear his terrible burden unaided, for a desperate idea had occurred to him. Who could he more certainly trust than his old and revered friend, the rector himself? No man living. But what he shrank from was the possible—nay, probable—loss of intimacy that would result from the avowal. Dr. Ingelow was an Anglican priest, but then he was also a father. No word would pass his lips—but would it not hasten his steps to the grave once the old man learned that his daughter's husband was a murderer, a man whose life would be forfeit for the rest of his days? And how should he meet a murderer on terms of friendship from day to day? To Roland, circumstanced as he was, there seemed a strange, subtle, protecting influence in the cordial intimacy existing between himself and the old priest, and he dreaded to cut away this sheet-anchor with his own hand. So this idea had slipped from him in despair, and he seemed as one hopelessly drifting.

And then again a new hope leaped into existence. Dr. Ingelow had been a great traveller in his younger days. He knew what it was to carry his life in his hand. He had seen men shot down on very slight provocation in wild, lawless regions where a man must be ready to answer for his acts, and even his words, with his life, if not quick enough to defend it. Surely no man living was more qualified to judge of a case by its own merits. He would take a broader view than the cut-and-dried rules of a high-pressure, artificial state of society, recognising that England is not the world, nor yet its law-giver.

And now, walking beside his friend in the gathering

gloom, Roland thought the moment had come. The remembrance of his resolution was strong in his mind, and he could imagine the rector once more the cool, wary traveller in wild countries, where friends stood by each other to the death.

"My confidence!" he echoed huskily. "I greatly fear I may regret giving it, but——" and again he paused, his features working strangely.

What a wonderful thing is life with its contrasts! Only two friends returning home this lovely evening from a day of healthful exercise, the cheerful voices of those they had left behind scarcely out of earshot. No more than this would the casual saunterer along that unfrequented foot-path through the plantations meet or see. Yet, what could be of more awful moment than the subject of their discussion! If the supernatural powers to which one of these two lays claim exist, such powers are bounded by no considerations of time or locality; are dependent on no such matters of detail as official insignia. They exist or they do not, and if the former, can neither be qualified nor limited. Can it be that these silent woods—these glittering stars looking down through the leafless boughs, are about to witness a solemn act of absolution, and that from one of these men will be lifted a terrible weight of blood-guilt—even the curse of Cain? Surely it seems that those peaceful stars reflect the light of angelic eyes, and that even the voice of God might be heard in this secluded place.

But it is Earth after all. Whatever confidence might have been imminent, an interruption befals, a diversion is created—and by what? Only a dog.

Ranging at will, forgotten of his master, Roy's quick ear has detected a stealthy footfall among the dry crisp leaves, and there he stands, with hair erect and fangs bared, snarling savagely at a dark, thickset form, whose efforts to pacify him only seem to augment his hostility.

"Come away, Roy, you rascal—come away, sir, d'you hear?" cried Roland. The dog obeyed, and retreated reluctantly to his master's side, keeping up a running fire of most threatening growls. "Down, sir. And now, who are you?"

"It's only me, sir," answered a gruff voice.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Devine? By the way, have you been over at the Hall?"

"Well, sir," answered the man in rather hangdog fashion, "I've a bin over to see Mister Lucas about them dawgs the Kurnel was to have, and took a short cut back."

"I see. Is that shoot to come off the day after to-morrow, do you know?"

"Well, sir, the Kurnel don't seem to have made up his mind. But he'll be sure to let you know. There's lots o' rabbits in the cliff jest above Smugglers' Ladder, sir," added the keeper, in a different tone, looking Roland keenly in the face. "Such lots are there, that they pitches each other over, sometimes. I see'd one wunst, one moonlight night."

Although feeling as if suddenly shot through the heart, Roland made no sign. With a short nod, he turned away. Roy, still growling deeply, walked close at his side, as if his instinct told him that his beloved master might come to need more than all the watchfulness of the most faithful of friends in the impending peril. It was the third time of late that Stephen Devine had let fall a sinister hint.

This interruption had given the rector time to reflect, and with a foresight which, when he came to look back upon it in the days that were coming, seemed to him little short of inspired, he now saw that the interruption was an opportune one. He was the first to break the silence, and his tones were very grave and solemn.

"Roland, my dear son. I will gladly receive your confidence, but not here. There must be no possibility of interruption, and no half measures—and—there may be other reasons. I can see you are overwrought and tired now, therefore rest and place yourself in a calm and composed disposition. Then we will talk, and more freely."

Not another word passed between them. The confidential strain in which they had been interrupted seemed to preclude lighter topics. And they were nearly home now.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE WEB WEAVES.

THE bright, frosty weather lasted nearly a month, and was followed by a whole month of rain and squalls, culminating in a truly furious March. The trees in the park bent and groaned beneath the lashing wind; and night and day driving showers hurled themselves against the window panes with a crash as of volleys of gravel. At such times, even from Cranston, the thunder of the surf upon the cliff-girt coast could be plainly heard, and safe in her comfortable, luxurious home Olive would shudder at the dull booming of the billows and at the recollections conjured up by the sound. But it was with feelings of deepest thankfulness that she dwelt on that dark and terrible time, while realising her present lot of joyfulness and peace.

And, during this period of conflicting elements, a great and singular change had come over Roland Dorrien. He seemed like a man from whom a great weight of care had been suddenly lifted, an impending danger miraculously averted. His brooding despondency had completely left him, and though he was grave at times, it was with a seriousness far removed from that moodiness and settled gloom which had caused the charitable to whisper hints about hereditary insanity. His cheerfulness, too, became free and unaffected, displacing those wild, excitable fits of hilarity, followed by their corresponding periods of reaction and gloom. The neighbourhood marvelled, but it could do no more, for the cause of this metamorphosis in the Squire of Cranston was known only to one living person and guessed at by another—Dr. Ingelow and Olive.

And the latter rejoiced with an exceeding great joy, and her cup of happiness was now, indeed, full. Never by word, or hint, or look had she sought to arrive at that

which had caused her husband to return home in the small hours of a certain dark winter morning with such an expression of relief, yes, and of peace upon his face as she had never dared hope to behold there again. Never, even to herself, had she ventured to conjecture, except with the most reverential awe and thankfulness, as to the instrument of this miraculously restored peace; the power which had exorcised the evil spirit and restored to her this man in whom her life was wrapped up—restful, free from care, happy. If she dimly guessed at the nature of that power, she was content to stop there.

This afternoon the rain crashed and volleyed on the panes in such wise as to render the snug morning room doubly snug. Suddenly Olive broke into a peal of laughter.

"Roland, dear, that seems a desperately engrossing book you have got hold of."

"Hullo! And why?"

"Because you haven't turned a page for eighteen minutes. Eighteen minutes! I timed you by the clock."

"By Jove! no more I have! No. Fact is, I've been thinking out an idea."

"Let's have it then."

"Well, then—how should you like to go away for a time? To travel, in fact?"

"Oh, immensely," she cried gleefully. "Where shall we go. Italy? It would be delightful to get out of this hideous weather for a couple of months. No, I should like to go to a new country this time. What about Spain? Or better still, Algiers? There—I've set my heart on Algiers."

"All right. We can't go too far, I think, nor yet too soon. So see if we can't manage to get away at once. I feel as if my life depended on it."

Hardly had he spoken the words than they struck him with a prophetic import. The fact was, he had been revolving this plan for some time past. It would be good for them both, in every way, besides which he felt an irresistible longing to leave the neighbourhood for a considerable period. It seemed to him in some instinctive way that such a course would do away with the last

lingering possibility of danger. His apprehensions on the score of certain hints which Devine had from time to time let fall, were lulling. The fellow could have had nothing tangible to go upon. He was a shrewd rogue, merely talking at random in the hope of hitting the right nail on the head, but he, Roland, was too old a bird to hop upon any such palpably limed twig. Yet, on the whole, it might be safe to take a long change. Time blunts the edge of every weapon, even that dangerous one Suspicion.

They discussed the new scheme eagerly for half an hour, and then Olive got up, declaring she should go into the conservatory to get a little air. He laughed.

"Glad to get rid of you, dear. Only you won't get much air there, I should think, unless it's hot air. Wait—I've just got to dash off a couple of notes to a couple of tiresome fellows, and then I'll come after you."

Ten minutes later he had finished his writing.

"What an infernal day," he muttered, as he took his way down the covered passage leading to the conservatory. Suddenly he stopped short, arrested by the sound of a voice. In the harsh, northern tones he recognised that of Johnston, the Scotch gardener.

Strange as it may seem, this worthy was still in the Cranston service. That it was so may be due to various reasons. The canny Scot, on the sudden and unlooked-for accession of the General's exiled son, had hastened, with many plausible yet abject apologies, to make his peace with the reigning lord, for the berth was an uncommonly good one, and one to be kept at all costs. Roland, who knew the fellow to be a great rascal and felt towards him a hearty contempt, had kept him on, and his reasons for doing so were various. In the first place, it would save trouble, for the man was good at his work; then he had an idea that he might ascertain whether Johnston really had recognised him that day at Battisford, but as time went on and the man made no sign, his suspicions were lulled. However, the arrogance of so presuming a knave must be kept within bounds, and Johnston no longer dared tyrannise over his betters, by virtue of his office, as he had been wont to do in the old times. On one or two occasions, Roland had come up in time to overhear

him rebuking in his old bumptious strain a guest who had ventured to pick a flower, and the trouncing he had got had made the worthy Scot squirm.

He hated his master with a bitter, rancorous hatred, but still he stayed on, for he foresaw the day when he might be revenged on him upon whom he now fawned, saw it dimly still, but opening wide possibilities. So patiently and warily the crafty Gael had watched and waited until the weapon should be ready to his hand, and then how he would strike! But to resume.

A frown of terrible import came over Roland's face as he paused for a moment. The rain was volleying against the glass sides of the conservatory, but above its rattle, he could hear his wife's voice, speaking in what seemed to him a tone of scared expostulation, and then the Scot replied:

"—A don't want to hurrt yere guidman, but after these yeers of surrvice a' think ye might promise me that place for my bairn, Davy. Ye wouldn't be wanting to leave this bonny hoose yeerself, awm thinking."

"Johnston! How dare you talk to me like that!" came the startled and indignant rejoinder.

Roland waited to hear no more. The blaring insolence of the fellow's tone set his blood surging. There was a half-scream from Olive as he entered suddenly, confronting the astonished speaker.

"Go," he said. "You are discharged this instant. Go out of my sight, before I forget myself."

But Johnston had been drinking; yet, even though backed by a certain amount of "Dutch courage," he deemed it advisable to withdraw a few paces.

"Would ye murrder me—too?" he yelled.

Roland still controlled himself with an effort little short of superhuman, but his face was white and icy.

"Go," he said. "You are discharged."

"Dischairged!" echoed Johnston sneeringly, for he had backed away to a safe distance. "Dischairged, am I? I'll have the law on ye if ye assault me, but it's a noose ye'll come to for this day's wurrk."

And with this parting shot, he took himself off.

Olive was terribly alarmed and disturbed. The violence

of the incident, and the dark and mysterious threats had upset her not a little. Tenderly, Roland set to work to soothe her.

"My darling, tell me all about it."

She told him—how Johnston had accosted her directly she entered the place, asking her to use her influence to get his wages raised and also to procure a place for his son, who, by the way, was an out-and-out young rascal. She could see that the man had been drinking, and so had answered him quietly at first. Then his manner had become insolent and threatening, and he had hinted at terrible mischief which it was in his power to work his employer in the event of refusal.

"It was only talk, Roland, wasn't it?" she urged, clinging to him. "Darling, tell me that he has no power to harm you. He has not—has he?"

As a matter of fact the threat had momentarily struck him with a pang of the old alarm. Momentarily, because, invoking reason to his aid, he decided that the rascally Scot had got his suspicions at second-hand from Gipsy Steve when the precious pair were in their cups. The suspicions of these two scoundrels were harmless. Only if he flinched might they become dangerous. So he had acted with decision, as we have seen.

"Not the slightest!" he answered reassuringly. "If he has I'll give him every opportunity of putting it to the test. Off he goes this very evening, bag and baggage."

CHAPTER XL.

THE BAN AGAIN.

THE Cranston party had organised a picnic to Durnley Castle.

It was May—bright, flowery, laughing May—neither spring nor summer, but something of both. The sun's rays were not too powerful this glorious afternoon, as with a delicious warmth they poured down upon the fields studded with golden buttercups and delicate bluebells, and distilled the sweet scent from blossoming hawthorn hedges, where the linnet and grey-backed shrike sat patiently upon their eggs, secure in the recesses of their thorny covert. Fair to the eye were the velvety coppices, with their newly-donned mantles of bright green, whence issued the soft coo of the turtle-dove, and the flap of the cushat's wing among the branches. Then, too, how light-hearted the joyous, oft-repeated note of the cuckoo, sounding over the pleasant landscape!

Durnley Castle was a fine ruin, with massive ivy-grown walls still rising to a considerable height; and standing as it did on a lofty headland, the views of the coast obtained from it were superb. Otherwise it was much like other ruins of the kind, its scarp being literally strewn with bits of sandwich paper, ancient and modern, broken bottles, and similar relics of generations of picnic parties. It was under the care of a clan of cottagers, whose thatch might be detected among the trees hard by, which care mainly consisted in taking precious good care to collect sixpences, but stopped short at clearing away the abominable rubbish aforesaid.

"Eva," cried Ned Medlicott, the curate's twelve-year-old, running up to his sister, a pretty girl of eighteen, to exhibit some kestrel's eggs. "Look at these. Did you ever see such stunners!"

"'Stunners,' indeed," was the laughing reply. "Why, how did you get them, Ned?"

"I didn't *take* them," explained the boy; "Mr. Dorrien climbed the tree—but——"

"But the great thing is, here they are, eh, Ned?" cried Roland. "And it's my private opinion you'll break them before you get home."

He was thinking how thoroughly happy the boy looked, and how easily he had been made so, and the thought seemed to please him.

"Hullo, Eustace! Late as usual," he went on, as some new arrivals hove in sight, toiling up the steep escarpment. "Thought you had wrecked your party."

For Eustace had brought round the rest of the party by sea, in a sailing craft, chartered at Minchkil.

"Oh, did you? Now look here. Do you know what Thought did? No? Well, I'll tell you—Thought we had had a precious dry walk up from the boat, and lost no time in beheading one of those jolly long-necked bottles over there. Aren't I right, Mr. Medlicott?" turning to his companion.

"Oh, of course, you always are," answered the latter with a laugh. He was the senior curate of Wandsborough, a middle-aged, scholarly man—owning a vast family, two representatives of which were with the party, as we have seen.

"Worse and worse!" said Roland, with a shake of the head, and mischievously barring the way. "Eustace, I wash my hands of you—'fizz' before tiffin isn't good for little boys like you."

"Hallo—Sophonisba!" sang out Eustace. "Cut out one of those long-necked bottles, and sail round here with it, sharp! Your dear brother-in-law's getting mean in his old age. Marsland, tell her to. She'll do it if *you* tell her," added the mischievous dog, grinning all over his face, while his youngest sister looked viciously at him without complying.

"There, there. Go and do for yourself, Eustace," said Roland, letting him pass. "And now that we are all here, we can gather round the festive—table-cloth. Assort yourselves, good people, and do it well; if you don't it's your

own faults. Stewart, keep an eye on that subaltern of yours, and don't let him have too much champagne, or my wife says you will be held responsible as his superior officer."

Captain Stewart—in whose troop Eustace was—and who had run down with him for the occasion—vehemently declined responsibility, and set to work devoting himself to Eva Medlicott, to the no small satisfaction of that young lady.

"'Shop!' Bear witness all!" cried Eustace, tossing off his glass with the air of a man who had walked a mile up a steep hill at mid-day. "He's talking arrant 'shop.' Roland, old chap, consider yourself fined a case of this same 'gooseberry.' Stewart and I will take it up to Town with us to-night."

"Nonsense, you're not going to-night," said Olive.

"Am. With deep grief I say it—but—'painful necessities,' as the schoolmaster says upon certain occasions! If we miss that train I'm broke. Chief desperately glum—vows I've had four times too much leave already. Isn't that so, Stewart?"

"For once, Ingelow, truth and the exigencies of the Service compel me to support your statement," gravely replied the captain, whose attention was divided between his fair companion and the dispensing of a pigeon-pie to many hungry applicants.

There was a laugh at this, and then, the contagion spreading, the fun grew apace, and never a merrier party made the grey old ruins ring. It was a model picnic party, not too large, all fairly well known to each other, or, in the case of an exception or two, acquisitions to any circle, and all young, except perhaps the curate, who was such a thoroughly good-natured man that his quietness—"slowness" we are afraid they called it—was quite forgiven him. Then there were no elderly chaperons to spoil sport with their whisperings and confounded sharp-sightedness, and not even a botanically-minded old maid to drag off some wretched youth to grub up fern-roots for her, when he would fain be wandering *perdu* in another direction with a very different sample of charmer.

The Dorriens had been obliged to defer their foreign

trip. Business of all sorts, connected more or less with the property, which could not well be left to others, had kept cropping up in the most vexatious manner since we heard them making their plans nearly two months ago. To Roland these delays had been irritating in the extreme, but now he thought he saw the end of them, and had made up his mind to start early next month. There was one bright side to it all. He had heard no more mysterious hints. These seemed to have ceased since the departure of Johnston, who had left the neighbourhood altogether when summarily dismissed from Cranston.

Luncheon over, the party dispersed themselves abroad according to taste—in pairs or in squads. Others preferred taking things easy where they were. Besides those named, there were half a dozen other people who are not specially concerned with this history.

"Hallo! Who are these chaps, I wonder?" suddenly exclaimed Eustace, who was having a quiet weed with his brother-in-law, in a snug, sunny corner of the ruin. Two men were strolling leisurely towards them, stopping every now and then, as if admiring the view to seaward. The foremost had a telescope slung round him, while the other carried a butterfly-net and specimen box. They might have been a brace of well-to-do tradesmen.

"Where? Oh! The advance guard of a cheap trip, most likely. Two waggonettes of hooraying yahoos to follow," was the somewhat dissatisfied reply.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the foremost of the new arrivals. "Excuse my asking, but is there any objection to me and my friend going over the castle."

"None whatever, as far as I know," answered Roland good-naturedly. "By the way, is there a trip behind you?"

The men looked mystified for a moment, then the naturalist replied.

"Oh, no, gentlemen, only we two. We walked over from Wandsbro', we two did, just to look at the view from here, and catch a few butterflies."

"Caught any?"

"Not to speak of, sir. Just these two or three," opening his green box. A tortoiseshell of dissipated aspect, and a couple of orange tips stood displayed.

"H'm! Well, as far as I know you'll find nothing to prevent you going where you like. Only I should advise you to be careful in walking about the walls, because they're unsafe in parts."

The men thanked him and walked away. Eustace and Roland, grateful that the invasion took so mild a form, puffed their cigars lazily, and straightway forgot all about it. Had they been aware of it, what matter to them that the strangers, exploring round the ruins, should light upon the Cranston footman, lunching on the relics of the spread, and that the said strangers, being of an engaging manner after their kind, should, in a trice, find themselves on the best of terms with James, resulting in much friendly consumption of Cranston ale, all round.

"That your governor, up there?" said he of the telescope presently, jerking a thumb in the direction he had just left.

"Which?" asked James laconically.

"Tall gent—light clothes—talks like God Almighty."

"Yes, that's him."

"Good governor?" said the butterfly-catcher.

"So, so. Too much shirt, though—rather."

"Hey?"

"Too shirty, for them as doesn't like it," explained James.

Then, with tongue loosened by a liberal allowance of ale, indiscriminately poured upon the absorption of the residue of unfinished champagne bottles, the faithful James proceeded to give his new friends a full, true, and above all, humorous account of his master's idiosyncrasies, whereat the strangers laughed till they could no longer sit upright. But even the graphic James missed the real humour of the thing, as conveyed from one to the other of his listeners in a swift and irresistibly comic glance.

The afternoon had reached the debatable ground lying between itself and evening, and the diverse and errant members of the party had found their way back to the rendezvous. And last of all arrived Marsland and Sophie, trying to look as if they had been there all the time; and

the latter, catching her brother's eye, read therein a mute and satirical assurance that she had not heard the last of her tardy arrival and eke of its circumstances.

"Don't wait for me, anybody who wants to stroll on," said Olive, who was superintending the putting away of the things. "I'll come on afterwards."

"And, by the way, Stewart, do you mind taking the ribbons going back?" said Roland. "I'm going home by way of the angry deep."

The Captain declared himself delighted, as in fact he was. A smart whip, he flattered himself he would show those four slashing bays of Dorrien's at their best.

"Ta-ta, Stewart. Good people, I hope all your lives are insured! I know what Stewart on the box means," sung out the irrepressible Eustace, with a fiendish chuckle over the misgiving which he had flung in among the driving party. "And now for the rolling deep!"

We will follow the party in the boat. Besides Eustace and Roland there were two young ladies from Wandsborough and Mr. Medlicott and Ned. Item, an amphibious youth from Minchkil, who represented the "crew."

It was a lovely evening. There was just enough breeze to propel them gently and without rocking, and a fragrant whiff of sweet hawthorn reached them even there. As they stood out to sea, the moon shone out brighter and brighter in the clear sky, glancing upon the tiny ripples as though its light were touching the moving spear points of a host. Then, as they presently rounded the headland, a hollow and tuneful echo seemed wafted back to them as the waves plashed against the semi-circle of cliff with the inflowing tide.

Eustace and the two Wandsborough girls were deep in a wordy war of banter and laughter, the former steering villainously in consequence. Roland and the curate were puffing at their cigars and lazily conversing in the fore part of the boat, and young Ned was playfully pulling Roy's ears. Suddenly through the stillness of the night, above the musical ripple as the bow of the boat cleft the water, above the bell-like plash of the waves upon the shore, a strange, mysterious sound came wafting over the moonlit sea, a sound as of the deep-toned howling of a dog.

The sky, studded with stars, is without a cloud. Yonder, shadowed by the lofty headland, the grey rock-turrets of The Skegs stand forth spectral under the clear moon. Again that most dismal sound floats out upon the night air, but no one seems to hear or notice it. No one? One—that is. One who has heard it before. The curate, glancing at his host, is surprised and alarmed at the latter's face, for it is ashy white; and following the set and rigid gaze, behold! a dark shadow is resting blackly upon the summit of the haunted rock. And Roy, with his hackles erect and gums drawn back, is snarling aggressively in response.

The terrible and grisly Ban once more. What does it portend?

CHAPTER XLI.

THE SWORD FALLS.

Olive was rather unwell on the morning after the picnic. It was nothing to worry about, she declared. She supposed she had overdone it, and was a little tired. Any way, she would stay in bed till the afternoon. So Roland and Sophie sat down to a late breakfast alone, Marsland having left earlier to spend a few days at Ardleigh.

"What a jolly day we had yesterday!" the girl was saying. "Olive didn't catch cold, did she, Roland?"

"No. She'll be all right after a good sleep. Roy, you vagabond, shut up. That melodious voice of yours is matter in the wrong place just now."

But Roy, who had been lying curled up on the rug, refused to be silenced. His threatening growl became a deep-toned bay, and his ruff began to rise, as with fangs bared he sprang towards the door, which was yet shut. There were voices in the hall. Then the door opened.

"Come here, Roy, d'you hear, sir?" cried Roland, seizing him by the neck and dragging him by main force towards the rug. "Now. Lie down, sir."

The dog would hardly obey, but half rose again, keeping up a running note of growls.

"Please, sir," said the butler, entering, "there are two gentlemen want to see you very particular."

"Who are they?"

"They won't give their names, sir, and I never saw them before."

Roland frowned. "Suppose I must send the fellows about their business. Back in a minute, Sophie."

It may be that an ugly misgiving shot through his mind at that moment, but if so he showed no sign of it. As Jervis said afterwards, with awe and admiration in his

voice: "Master was out-and-out the very coolest party he'd ever seen."

The strangers were standing in the hall. With astonishment he recognised the men who had accosted him at Durnley Castle the day before.

"Your name is Roland Dorrien, I believe, sir?" began one of them, before he had time to ask a question.

"It is. Kindly walk in here and state your business with me."

He held open the study door. The others, with a moment's hesitation, accompanied him within. Then they turned.

"I have a most unpleasant duty to perform, sir," said the spokesman of the pair.

"And that?" said Roland coolly, though conscious that his face was becoming white.

"Is to arrest you on the charge of murder. Here is the warrant," said the other very gravely. "I must, as a matter of form, caution you against making any statement, though as a magistrate yourself, sir, you will be aware of this formality."

"Yes, the warrant is all right," he said, running his eye over it and noting idly that it was signed by a man with whom he had next to no personal acquaintance.

The sword had fallen at last. Was he dazed—was he dreaming—or was he really stunned? Was he, Roland Dorrien—one of the most influential men in the county, and lord of this noble patrimony whose limits he could not see from his highest window—was he, indeed, a prisoner, henceforth no longer master of the simplest of his own actions? Horror incredible!

Something of this must have appeared in his aspect as he turned away, for the detective watched him keenly.

"Let me see. I don't know whether you will prevent my just saying a word to Mrs. Dorrien before I go with you. She is rather unwell this morning, and this in addition will try her dreadfully."

The officer shook his head.

"I'm extremely sorry, sir, but it can't be done. You see I'm bound not to lose sight of you, and if I were to go with you it would frighten the lady still more."

Roland faced round upon him.

"Listen. What if I were to pledge you my word of honour to return to you here in ten minutes?"

For half a moment the detective wavered. Then he shook his head very gravely.

"Can't do it, sir!"

"No? Hang it! I suppose it wasn't fair of me to put you into such a position. And you've been very good in managing so quietly. Of course—one would have time to do all manner of queer things in ten minutes. I'll order the brougham at once. It'll be thought I've gone gaol-visiting, ha-ha!"

Again the officer eyed him very curiously. That strange laugh, teeming with a subtle irony, the queer carelessness of his tone, put the detectives thoroughly upon their guard, and caused them to determine that there was something about this case that was decidedly "fishy." They were fully alive, too, to the importance of their errand. It was not every day that their duty required them to arrest a gentleman, a squire and a J.P., for murder.

Roland rang the bell and gave the necessary orders. In a few minutes the brougham came round. The officers had declined all offers of refreshment, and became very impatient to start. Sophie was passing through the hall as they came out.

"Why, where are you going, Roland?" she asked in astonishment.

"Got to go to Battisford on business. Take care of yourselves till I come back. Bye-bye!"

The girl looked puzzled, but there was no time for further explanations, and the three men, getting into the brougham, were driven off. And Barnby, the principal detective, still continued to watch his prisoner closely, and drew his own conclusions. In his heart of hearts he was thoroughly convinced of the other's guilt; but the pluck and coolness displayed by Roland under the circumstances of his arrest filled him with admiration, for it was unparalleled, even in that astute officer's experience.

But oh, the torture of the breaking heart which could smile, and even half jest, at that awful moment! Even at the time when life was at its very sweetest to him, had the

sword fallen—and yet not; for had he not been torn away at a moment's notice, nor allowed even a glance of farewell at the sweet face of her who constituted all his world? But for that horrible, jarring calm which he had assumed as a mask, his self-control would have been nowhere.

They reached Battisford, and drew up at the gaol. As a magistrate it had frequently been Roland's duty to visit it; consequently his entrance into the gloomy building caused no comment among those who witnessed it now. Even the stolid turnkey was awed on receiving into his keeping one so high among the great ones of the land. To the last the prisoner's coolness did not desert him. He scribbled off a short note.

"Watts. Drive round by Wandsborough on your way back and give this to Dr. Ingelow; and if he isn't in wait till he is. You needn't call for me, as I shall be engaged here for some hours." And again that mocking laugh lurked in his face.

The coachman touched his hat and drove off. Roland Dorrien followed the turnkey to the cell appointed to him. He needed nothing for the present, he said, and so that vigilant guardian, closing the door on him, retired, having respectfully hoped and trusted that he would soon be able to clear himself, as, of course, he easily could.

Clear himself? Not he. This was the fate awaiting him, and from it there would be no escape. The wraith on The Skegs had never been known to appear in vain.

Here for the first time he dared to think—here, where no eye was upon him. Yesterday, love, happiness, peace—to-day, this! Yesterday, powerful, wealthy, free—the envied of all; to-day, not the meanest loafer in Battisford market-place would change with him. Ah, good God! why had he escaped by a hairsbreadth, as it were, from the deadliest of perils that night on the sea shore! Was it for this? Better a thousand times that the wild waves had been his grave—both their graves then. And the cold walls of his stone cell echoed such an anguished and despairing groan as is seldom wrung from the breast of mortal man.

It was not until late in the day that Olive awoke.

Quickwitted Sophie had not been deceived by her brother-in-law's assumed coolness, and though absolutely in the dark as to the real facts, she could not help fearing that something had gone very wrong. As the day wore on, and he did not come, this feeling increased, and when at length the brougham returned, it was with a feeling of vast relief that she ran to the door. But it contained only her father.

It happened that when, in pursuance of his orders, Watts called at the Rectory, the old priest had just started on his rounds, and was not to be found anywhere. There was a great deal of sickness in Wandsborough at the time, and no one could say exactly where he was. As a matter of fact he had been called over to Minchkil Bay to attend the dying bed of one of the old seafarers. But the coachman's orders were positive. He was to wait for him, and wait he did, and so it was not until late in the afternoon that the brougham started to return to Cranston.

All used as he was to strange and startling revelations, the rector could not repress a start of astonishment as he rapidly scanned the contents of the note which old Watts handed to him. But his normal calm soon returned, and, entering the carriage there and then, he was driven rapidly away to Cranston.

There was time in the interval to think over the situation, but he was grateful for every moment of it. His unfortunate friend was called upon to satisfy human justice after all, and he, Dr. Ingelow, was required to break the terrible news to his daughter. Yet it might be the barest suspicion—two years and a half was a long time. It would be difficult to convict. But then the prosecution must be in possession of very strong evidence indeed to move it to such a step as the arrest of a man of Roland Dorrien's status.

In all his experience—large as it was—the rector could not call to mind a more painful case. What frightful ruin the conviction of this man would entail! How much better, for every reason, that the terrible secret should remain buried—a turned-down page of the past! Thus musing, he arrived at Cranston.

"Oh, father. What has gone wrong?" cried Sophie affrightedly, reading the worst in his grave face.

Enjoining silence, her father took her apart, and in a few words communicated the fact of the arrest. The whole countryside would be ringing with it by then, and it was just as well that those most concerned should learn it at first-hand. The girl, though very shocked and awed, was quite self-possessed. Her first thought was for her sister.

"Can we not keep it from her a little longer?" she asked.

"Impossible. She will hear it by chance from others, and then think of the result. You had better leave us alone together, dear, but remain within call."

It was well for Olive that her father was the one upon whom it devolved to soften the terrible weight of the blow. But though she listened with livid face and ashy lips, she was calmer than he had dared to hope. Roland was alive and unharmed—that was relief. But in prison—in a cold, hard cell—and on a charge of murder! It was frightful. He a murderer! No, she would never believe that. Some absurd mistake had been made, and he would soon be released. Why, it was too ridiculous, and she almost laughed aloud at the bare idea.

Then Memory, like a mocking fiend, started up to dash even that consolation from her grasp. For it suddenly carried her back over the lapse of years to the chance meeting with her lover on the beach, that lowering afternoon when the tide overtook them. His words, spoken then, now darted in characters of fire before her mental gaze.

"*The trammelled imagination of a canting world reads crime into what is no crime at all.*"

He had been urging a secret barrier existing between them—one that she, in common with society at large, would recognise as irrefragable. And she, mistaking the drift of the plea, had answered bravely that nothing would cause her to shrink from him.

They had talked at cross purposes. Now—the whole mystery stood explained. By the light of this *dénouement* the scales fell from her eyes—even the intervening events were clear as daylight to her now. But could she now answer as bravely as then upon the lone sea shore?

Every whit.

Looking up, she met her father's eyes steadily and without speaking. And the flash of meaning in that glance revealed to him that she was no longer a blind believer in her husband's innocence. Looking back in after years to this moment, the old priest was conscious of a distinct satisfaction at the time in making the discovery. It would save all danger of cross purposes, though no word on the certainty could be exchanged between them.

"Oh, father! *you* don't believe in—in this accusation!"

"I don't believe that Roland is a murderer," was the answer; straight, unhesitating, and in tones of conviction. "Men have been arrested on suspicion before to-day and honourably acquitted. Keep your wholesome, loving belief in him firm and unshaken, Olive my pet, and be strong for his sake."

The old man's voice shook as he strove to comfort this his best-loved child, but he mastered himself. Her faith in the accused man must be kept up at all hazards, nothing must dim that bright, pure flame. It had been his safeguard hitherto; it must not fail him now.

"I will indeed be strong. And now—I must go to him at once."

"Not to-night, darling. Indeed, it will be impossible. To-morrow, we can procure the necessary order, the first thing. His first thought was of you—and—again I say it—you must be brave and strong for his sake."

It was indeed well for Olive that her father's loving and clear-sighted wisdom was with her in the dark hour of her affliction. Already she felt soothed and hopeful. Yet there flashed across her mind the similarity between this parting and that other one in Wandsborough street, nearly three years ago. Then they had expected to meet again in a few hours, and lo! a very lifetime of separation had been theirs ere they met again. This time he had merely left her by the breadth of a few rooms, and now the gloomy walls of a prison separated them. The parallel was ominous.

In due course, the preliminary examination was held, and the magistrates had no alternative but to commit Roland Dorrien for trial at the ensuing Battisford assizes on the capital charge. Further, the Bench intimated, with infinite regret, that no question of bail could by any possibility be entertained.

CHAPTER XLII.

"GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY?"

To describe the state of excitement into which Wandsborough was thrown, when the tidings of Roland Dorrien's arrest were bruited about—as they very soon were—would baffle the most graphic pen. Why, nothing approaching to this had ever befallen in their midst. The Squire of Cranston, the most influential of local magnates, greater even in point of possessions than Colonel Neville, the chairman of Petty Sessions, to be arrested on a criminal charge—one, too, for which, if convicted, he would inevitably suffer the death of a common malefactor. No, Wandsborough had, assuredly, never experienced the like of this.

To most of the accused's brother magistrates, the case was a painful affair. There was sufficient *prima facie* evidence to send it for trial, so for trial it went, and their responsibility ended. But the police court was crammed during the examinations, and all Wandsborough was making up its mind as to whether the accused was guilty or not, the balance of opinion leaning, if anything, to the former.

Needless to say, no expense was spared to secure the very best legal talent. That done, there was nothing left for all concerned, but to possess their souls in patience. The accused, in the bitter solitude of his prison cell, set his teeth grimly, and muttered twenty times a day, "Let them fight it out." But his legal advisers found him anything but a satisfactory client.

The time between the committal and the opening of the assizes was not unduly long, and during it Olive had visited him once. But the galling restrictions imposed upon the visit by gaol regulations, and the immense strain upon the self-control of both, had rendered the interview too trying altogether. Outwardly Olive was calmness itself, cheerful too, and making plans for the future, affecting to treat the whole thing as an absurd mistake; yet her

demeanour did not deceive him, although he was willing she should believe it did.

At length the momentous day dawned. The Battisford assizes had been duly opened, and the grand jury had returned a true bill against Roland Dorrien for the wilful murder of his brother Hubert.

The Court-house at Battisford was large and spacious, but not large enough for one half of those who would fain have gained admission. As the accused entered the dock, the sea of faces craned forward, white with excitement and eagerness, was bewildering at first, but only at first. There was a slight frown and contraction of the brows, and a pallor which might have been the result of an anxious period of close confinement; otherwise the prisoner's face was cold, impassive, almost haughty, as he swept one glance around the Court. The wooden-faced judge, in crimson and ermine, the rows of wigged and gowned counsel—these he felt were scrutinising him keenly. The High Sheriff, too—why, he had narrowly escaped being pricked for that office himself, this very year. Then he became aware that he was being called upon to listen to an indictment couched in rolling legal phraseology, and to plead accordingly.

"Not Guilty!"

The tone, firm, indifferent, might have been ventriloquised out of an ice-block. He was not there to waste emotion, thought the prisoner grimly.

Then the prosecuting counsel proceeded to open his case on behalf of the Crown. Concisely he went over the facts connected with Hubert Dorrien's disappearance two years and a half previously, with the subsequent search and its result, or rather, want of result; upon the subsequent finding of a body upon the sea shore, which, although the face was unrecognisable, the clothing, and its marks, watch, &c., were amply sufficient to identify as that of the missing man, and the inquest immediately held upon it had decided accordingly. But circumstances had come to light, which went to show that what had been regarded as a lamentable accident there was reason to believe was nothing less than a deliberate, vindictive and cold-blooded murder, committed by the prisoner who stood before them to take his trial, and the very fact that he stood there

showed that there was sufficient evidence to justify that belief. Whether that belief were turned into a certainty would rest with the twelve honourable and intelligent gentlemen who were there to try the case.

The jury liked this opening. They had always heard of Benham, Q.C., as a very big gun indeed, now they were going to have a chance of hearing his oratorical gifts. Outwardly he was a tall, pleasant-voiced man, in the prime of life, and he had a persuasive way with him.

He should show, he went on, how prisoner had come to Battisford disguised, how he had put up at "The Silver Fleece Inn" in that town, under the pseudonym of Robert Durnford, and had laid his plans and watched his opportunity, and having lured his brother to a lonely spot upon the cliffs between that town and Wandsborough, had there done him to death in the darkness of night, as he thought, unseen by human eye.

Then counsel proceeded to call his first evidence. This was given, in succession, by those who had found the body, two or three fishermen from Minchkil. These were examined by Benham's junior, and their evidence being purely technical, they were soon disposed of. They were followed by the medical man who had testified at the inquest, and who declared now, as he had declared then, and unhesitatingly, that death was due to drowning. There were marks of bruises on the body, but not such as would cause death, or even contribute to that result.

There was a stir of sensation among the densely-packed crowd as Mr. Benham called for his next witness, for this was no other than Mrs. Dorrien, the General's widow. A tall figure in deep black made its way to the witness-box with rapid, but firm, steps. A chair was placed for her by direction of the judge.

Then, as Mrs. Dorrien slowly removed her heavy veil, her glance fell upon her surviving son; that son, whom she had never seen since he left his father's house those years ago. Then they had parted in coldness, if not in anger. Now they met again thus, the mother and the son.

Roland met her eyes firmly, and there was no sign of shrinking in his mien. Her face was pale as death, but stern, impassive and determined as his own. In it there appeared not a trace of pity.

"Pray be seated, Mrs. Dorrien," said Mr. Benham in his suavest tone, when the witness had been sworn. "We shall endeavour to spare you unnecessary pain. All we want you to tell us are the circumstances under which your son Hubert was first missed."

Concisely, in a low, set tone, the widow complied. Aided now and again by a question from the judge, she stated how Hubert had left home to attend evening service at Cranston, how he had not returned, and how, on the following morning, being alarmed, she had told her husband, who had at once instituted a search, heading it in person—but without effect.

"One thing more, Mrs. Dorrien," said Mr. Benham, "and we shall have done. Had you any reason to suspect your eldest son, the accused, was anywhere in the neighbourhood?"

"None whatever."

"Any questions, Mr. Windgate?" asked the judge sharply.

"N—no, m' lord," replied the prisoner's advocate. "At least, yes," jumping up. "Just one. Will you kindly tell us, Mrs. Dorrien, were your two sons, Roland and Hubert, on good terms?"

"They had never quarrelled."

"They had never quarrelled," making a note. "That is to say, they were on good terms."

"They were not very cordial," said the witness in the same slow, monotonous voice in which her evidence had been given.

"Ah! They were not very cordial. Different temperaments, no doubt. Thank you, Mrs. Dorrien. That will do," said Mr. Windgate blandly, making another note.

As different as possible from his opponent was Mr. Windgate, Q.C., the prisoner's advocate. A little man, with bushy black whiskers, round in person, brisk and smiling in manner—he was sharp as a needle. Yet the way in which he extracted admissions from an unwilling witness left an impression on that uncomfortable personage that was soothing, not to say flattering. Mr. Benham, on the other hand, was apt to wax stern and slightly supercilious when on his mettle.

The next witness called was the Rev. Charles Curtis, the

vicar of Cranston. He gave a more or less succinct account of the search in which he had taken part, up to the time of meeting with Eustace Ingelow at the bottom of Smugglers' Ladder.

"This article was handed to you by young Mr. Ingelow?" asked Mr. Benham, holding up the silver matchbox which Eustace had picked up.

"It was."

"Had you ever seen it before?"

"Never."

"Nothing else was found at the time?"

"Not down below. I believe something was found above."

"Ah, we shall come to that presently. Thank you, Mr. Curtis. That will do."

Mr. Windgate, having no question to ask beyond that concerning the terms on which the two young gentlemen stood with each other, the vicar was soon released.

Then was taken the evidence of Thomas Platt, labourer, and afterwards, that of his wife—the pair who had last seen Hubert Dorrien alive on the fatal Sunday evening. The honest couple, who resided on the Cranston estate and looked up to the accused as their feudal lord, were mightily overcome by the awe of the situation, and the woful perplexity with which they made their statements convulsed the audience, vastly tickled the Bar, and enraged the judge to the last degree.

But the evidence of the rustic pair was straightforward enough, and tallied exactly, nor was it to be shaken by all the silky cross-questionings of the prisoner's counsel. Might they not have been mistaken about the direction the deceased was taking, or about the time? No—on all these points they were sure. They were of the soil born and bred, and on matters local like this were sharp enough. They had no feeling against the accused, quite the reverse. He was a kind master, although some folks were a bit afraid of him.

"We are not taking evidence as to the character of the prisoner, Mr. Windgate," reminded the judge crustily, drawing a suave apology from that eminent counsel, and the prompt bundling out of the box of the latter of the two rustic witnesses.

"I shall call Eustace Ingelow," said the Crown Counsel on the return of the Court after a short adjournment for lunch.

Poor Eustace was in a woful state of nervousness and genuine grief on behalf of his relative, as he took the oath. Indeed, it seemed as if he would hardly be able to deliver his evidence coherently.

"Take time, Mr. Ingelow," said Mr. Benham kindly. "There's no hurry—none whatever. You are, I believe, the prisoner's brother-in-law?"

"Yes."

"In a double sense?"

"I—I don't quite understand."

"What do you mean by 'a double sense,' Mr. Benham?" snapped the judge.

"We mean, m' lord, that they married each others' sisters." Here it became necessary to explain that the learned counsel was forging ahead too fast, and that at least half of his statement dealt with future contingencies instead of with actual facts. Which explanation tickled the audience and reduced the witness to a red-hot degree of nervousness. "And now, Mr. Ingelow," he went on, when the joke had subsided, "just tell the gentlemen of the jury what happened during the search you took part in. Were you asked to join in that search?"

"No. I did not even know what had happened until I saw Mr. Curtis and General Dorrien arrive on the beach. I was there at the time talking with Matt and Jem Pollock."

"And then you learned that Hubert Dorrien was missing?"

"Yes. I volunteered at once to join in the search."

"Were you acquainted with the deceased?"

"Very slightly. In fact, hardly at all."

"But you were acquainted with General Dorrien?"

A flush rose to Eustace's face, and he hesitated.

"I can't exactly say that. But—but—of course I knew him well by sight—and——"

"I can't hear a word the witness says," snapped the judge, "and I'm sure the jury can't."

"A little louder please, Mr. Ingelow. Did you find anything anywhere near the Smugglers' Ladder?"

"Yes. A piece of silk cord, such as might be used for an eye-glass."

"The deceased wore an eye-glass?"

"Yes."

"What did you do with this cord?"

"I took it to General Dorrien. He seemed to recognise it—but said nothing."

"Is this the cord?" handing it to the witness.

"I think so."

"How did you find it?"

"It was hanging on a tuft of grass on the brink."

"Now, what was your idea when you found this cord?"

"I thought it a very important trace. It seemed to point to the poor fellow having fallen in."

"Quite so. Were there any other traces?"

"The grass around the brink was crushed."

"Crushed and trampled?"

"M' lord, the witness said 'crushed,'" objected Mr. Windgate. "I must really object——"

"Well, 'crushed' then," went on Mr. Benham suavely. "My learned friend shall have no reason to complain of undue pressure on our part. Well, and what did you think then, Mr. Ingelow?"

"I thought there was no doubt about his having fallen into the chasm."

"Fallen in?"

"Yes."

"You had no suspicion then of foul play?"

"Not the slightest. I never heard that anyone had."

"Oh, you never heard that anyone had!" said Mr. Benham quickly, catching up the statement in just the way to embarrass and disconcert a nervous witness. And Eustace, remembering sundry cautions he had received in private about *volunteering* evidence, felt disconcerted accordingly.

His narrative of the descent of Smugglers' Ladder evoked considerable applause, for the ill-omened chasm was well known by reputation. He stated how he had found nothing on reaching the bottom.

"Nothing, Mr. Ingelow? Come, just cast your memory back."

"Well, I mean I found nothing of importance, only a little matchbox."

"Ah-h! Two years and a half is a long time to look back across at your age," said Mr. Benham kindly, hitching his thumbs into the shoulders of his gown and looking smilingly superior. "Now, what did you do with this little matchbox?"

"I handed it to Mr. Curtis."

"Is this it?"

"Yes."

There was a visible cloud on Eustace's face as he held the silver matchbox in his hand, as if it would burn him. Heads craned forward to catch a glimpse of the article.

"Had you ever seen that matchbox before you found it at the bottom of—er—Smugglers' Ladder," asked Mr. Benham impressively.

"I think so."

"Where did you see it?"

"I had seen it—er—I had seen Roland use it."

"You had see Roland Dorrien use it. How many times? Once—twice—perhaps?"

"I can't remember exactly how many times."

"No? You used often to—well—to have a pipe together, no doubt?"

"Yes."

"And Roland Dorrien was in the habit of using that matchbox?"

"Yes."

"In fact, you are under the impression it belonged to him?"

"Yes."

"Now, Mr. Ingelow—you are on your oath, mind. Is this, or is it not, the same matchbox which you saw in the prisoner's possession?"

"I can't positively swear to it. It is like it, certainly."

"Yet it is of very peculiar make."

"The witness says he can't swear to it, Mr. Benham," interposed the judge. "Don't you think we might drop the matchbox now?"

"Certainly, my lord. I have nothing further to ask."

"Nor I, my lord," said Windgate. And Eustace, to his unspeakable relief, was told to stand down, which relief was dashed by a miserable misgiving that he had somehow or other materially damaged his relative's chances.

CHAPTER XLIII.

DARKER AND DARKER.

To Eustace succeeded his father, and the appearance of Dr. Ingelow in the witness-box gave rise to not a little expectation on the part of many. They wondered what card the prosecution held up its sleeve, and although outwardly calmness and composure, so did he.

Beginning at his earliest acquaintance with Roland Dorrien, Mr. Benham put the rector through a long, minute, and tiresome examination, repeatedly challenged as irrelevant by the opposing counsel, as to his relations with the Dorrien family at that time. On these points the judge supported Mr. Windgate, and the queries were waived or put less pointedly.

"You recollect Hubert Dorrien's disappearance, Dr. Ingelow?" continued the prosecution, having brought the examination down to that stage.

"Perfectly."

"That was nearly five months after the prisoner had left Wandsborough, was it not?"

"About that time."

"And you had seen nothing of him since?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Did you know his whereabouts at that time?"

"I had not an idea of it."

"Will you swear to that?"

"Emphatically."

"When did you see him next?"

"Not till the following June."

"That is to say, from August of the previous year till June of the actual year in which the deceased met his death, you did not set eyes on Roland Dorrien?"

"You have my exact meaning."

"Did any of your family?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Will you repeat that statement?"

"Not to my knowledge."

Here Mr. Windgate made a careful note.

Then followed a great deal of questioning as to the prisoner's marriage and the terms upon which he and the witness had always stood.

"Now, Dr. Ingelow," went on the Crown counsel, waxing impressive. "Kindly give me your closest attention. You have always been on the most intimate terms with the prisoner."

"Always."

"Should you call him a man of a cheerful disposition?"

"Well—no."

"Ah! Now did not that ever strike you as a little strange in a man of his age and position in life?"

"I really can't say that it ever did."

Mr. Benham's face and attitude formed a study. He threw himself back and, with half-closed eyes, looking now at the ceiling, now at the witness, shook his head gently with the blandest of deprecatory smiles.

"Will you kindly tell the Court how long you have been in Holy Orders?"

"Thirty-three years."

"You have had great experience during that time?"

"I think I may say I have."

"Varied experience?"

"Decidedly varied experience."

"At Wandsborough and elsewhere?"

"Yes."

"Experience of character, human nature, and so forth?"

"Yes."

"Is it not a fact, Dr. Ingelow, that one of your daughters met with a narrow escape from drowning some time ago? Was cut off by the tide?"

"That is so."

"When did this occur?"

"About two years and a half ago."

"Was it anywhere near the time of Hubert Dorrien's disappearance?"

"It was."

"Before or after?"

"Just after."

"Just after. How long after?"

"As far as I can remember, about a fortnight after."

"The lady who met with that adventure is your second daughter, is she not?"

"Yes."

"And is now Mrs. Dorrien, the wife of the prisoner?"

"Yes."

"Ah! And now will you kindly tell the Court the circumstances of that—er—adventure?"

This the witness did, as briefly as possible. The tale was not new to the audience, few of whom, however, had heard it at first-hand. It was listened to with vivid interest, particularly the facts relating to the rescue by the mysterious stranger. Him—being asked to do so—the witness described to the best of his ability.

"This stranger—this Mr. Robert Durnford—gave you an address, you say—a London address? Did you ever apply at that address?"

"It was only a post-office address. I lost no time in writing to him at it."

"What was the address?"

"It was some London post office. The name of the post office has clean escaped my memory."

"You wrote to him. And you received no reply?"

"Pardon me. I did receive one."

"May I ask to what effect?"

"To the effect that the writer was on the eve of departure to New South Wales, and regretting that therefore our further acquaintance must remain in abeyance perhaps for years—also expressing gratification at having been instrumental in my daughter's escape. It was a courteous and kindly letter. I have heard nothing of him since."

"Quite so, Dr. Ingelow—quite so. Have you still that letter in your possession?"

"No. I have destroyed it, among other old papers."

"Lately?"

"N—no. It must be quite a year ago."

"Now, you are on your oath, Dr. Ingelow. You have not destroyed that letter since your son-in-law's arrest?"

"Your reminder is needless, sir. Nevertheless, for your greater satisfaction I will reiterate that the letter was destroyed quite a year ago."

"Well, well. Now did it strike you at the time that

any similarity existed between that stranger and the prisoner, Roland Dorrien?"

"It did not."

"No resemblance whatever? Voice—walk—manner? Come. Think again, my dear sir."

"Unnecessary. I saw no such resemblance."

"Has it ever struck you since?"

"It has not."

"You have never had reason to suspect that Robert Durnford, the rescuer of your daughter on that occasion, might have been Roland Dorrien in disguise?"

"I never have."

"You distinctly swear to that?"

"Distinctly."

"Don't you think, Mr. Benham, you've got out of this witness all you're likely to get?" said the judge snappishly.

"I have just put my last question, m' lord," was the suave reply. "Thank you, Dr. Ingelow." And Mr. Benham sat down, more nonplussed than he cared to show.

Mr. Windgate rose.

"I should be glad, my lord, if you would kindly make a note of the fact that this witness has three times distinctly sworn that no identity existed between the stranger, Robert Durnford, and my client, Roland Dorrien."

"Er—twice I think, Mr. Windgate," said the judge.

"Pardon me, my lord. Three times. If your lordship will glance back a few folios. This gentleman stated earlier in his evidence that from August till the following June he had not set eyes on the prisoner. Now, the young lady's adventure befel in February, between those months. Therefore the statement amounts to a denial of the identity."

"Very well, Mr. Windgate."

"Thank you, m' lord. I do not require to cross-examine."

So the rector stood down. Mr. Windgate was jubilant. The evidence just heard was all in his client's favour.

Considerable disappointment prevailed among the audience at the conclusion to which Dr. Ingelow's examination had been so abruptly brought. They looked for something far more exciting. Meanwhile, another witness was being sworn.

"Your name is George Newton?" queried Mr. Benham, "and you are a waiter at Welbrook's Tavern, in the Strand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you been long in that situation?"

"About nine years."

"Now, look at the prisoner. Have you ever seen him before?"

"Yes," replied the witness unhesitatingly.

"When?"

"Well, that I can't exactly say, sir. It might be a year or two ago. He came in one night to have some dinner—and seemed a bit flurried like. The first thing he did was to ask for an A.B.C. time-table. We 'adn't got one in the 'ouse, and the gentleman seemed rather put out about it."

"And then?"

"Well then, sir, we sent out and got him one."

"Now, just cast your memory back and see if you can tell us what day it was."

But this the witness could not do. He could swear most decidedly to the accused's identity, but for dates he had no recollection. The month on the A.B.C. was January.

"The gentleman seemed a bit queer," he went on. "He seemed to make a great point about getting the A.B.C., and then when he goes out what does he do but leave it behind!"

"Did you examine it?"

"Yes, sir. One of the pages had a corner turned down, and it was marked at Wandsborough Road station."

"You have it with you?"

"Yes, sir. Here it is." And the witness, fumbling in his pocket, produced the time-table which Roland Dorrien had forgotten and left behind him at the tavern in the Strand, on the night of his chance meeting with his brother.

It was even as the man had said—turned down and marked at Wandsborough Road station.

"Did you draw anyone else's attention to this circumstance?"

"Yes, sir. One of the other waiters, Tom Short."

"Where is he?"

"He's been dead these six or eight months."

"And you are ready to swear that the prisoner is the gentleman who left this with you?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Benham sat down, and Mr. Windgate rose to cross-examine. He seemed determined to make up for having hitherto been debarred his privilege in that line, for he assailed the witness in the most pitiless manner. But it was of no use. The man's evidence was straightforward enough, and he stuck to it, especially the identity—as to which he was calm certainty itself. All present felt that its burden was of damning import.

The next to enter the box was Johnston, the ex-Cranston gardener. His testimony went to show that the prisoner was identical with Robert Durnford, so called, the mysterious guest at "The Silver Fleece Inn." He swore positively to having recognised his late master in the disguised stranger, when the latter had passed him in the street at Battisford. He further deposed to having taken subsequent opportunities of observing the pseudo Durnford unknown to the subject of his observation, and was quite satisfied on the point of the identity between the two. Things began to look dark for the prisoner, but they were destined to look darker still.

When he had satisfied himself as to the identity of the accused with the stranger staying at "The Silver Fleece" in Battisford—he said—suspicion first entered his mind, and it grew stronger and stronger. Nor was it difficult to account for the fact that the one should be in the neighbourhood disguised at the very time the other met his death; the more so as the prisoner would be the gainer by his brother's death, and in fact was the gainer. From that time, he had laid himself out to watch the prisoner—and once had overheard some fragments of the latter's conversation with Dr. Ingelow, which had more than ever convinced him of the truth of his suspicions. Then Devine had begun to let fall hints as if he knew something about the matter, and, finally, the two of them had concluded to wait upon Mr. Forsyth, one of the county justices, and get his advice. In the result each made a statement.

That of Johnston was now put in, and read out. He

had nothing to withdraw or add to it, he said; and then Mr. Benham sat down.

But the revengeful half-grin on the face of the witness turned to rather a blank look as the defence began upon him in cross-examination.

Beginning with the subject of identity, Mr. Windgate tried all he knew to make Johnston own to a possibility of mistake. Then he went on the "bewilderment" plan, but the long-headed Scot was not to be floored in that way, nor could he be made to contradict himself. The vindictive rascal was precision personified. But when it came to the eavesdropping story, Mr. Windgate's tone was magnificent in its scathing contempt.

"Kindly tell the Court the date of your going to Mr.—er—Forsyth—the magistrate?"

"It was last month. About the 15th."

"About the 15th of last month?"

"Yes."

"You had then left Mr. Dorrien's service?"

"I had."

"How long had you left it?"

"About six weeks."

"Why did you leave it?"

"Mr. Roland turned me off."

"Oh! Mr. Roland turned you off, did he? Now have the goodness to tell us why?"

"Well, it was just this way. He thocht I wasn't speaking respectfully to Madam. So he turned me off."

"Now, be very careful. You are on your oath, mind. Penal servitude is among the consequences of perjury."

Mr. Benham to the rescue.

"Really, this is a most unwarrantable aspersion of the witness' veracity, which my learned friend is hardly justified in making."

"We shall see," uncompromisingly retorted the other "Now, Mr. Johnston, let me assist your memory. Did you not on the day you were dismissed accost Mrs. Dorrien in the conservatory, and ask for a certain situation for your son?"

"Yes."

"And hint that it was in your power to injure your master, if it was refused?"

"No."

"What?"

"No. I did no such thing," replied Johnston composedly.

Mr. Windgate was nonplussed. He stared at the witness in amazement.

"You did no such thing? Kindly repeat that?"

"I did no such thing."

"Very good. Remember you were warned what a false statement involved," said Mr. Windgate severely, making a voluminous note to conceal his chagrin. For the astute Q.C. had been completely foiled by the canny Scot. That worthy knew that his master's lips were sealed, and that even if his mistress could give evidence against himself it would merely be oath against oath. So having decided that he could commit perjury with impunity, he at least had the merit of doing it thoroughly.

"Well, the fact remains that Mr. Dorrien discharged you summarily. Now, did you threaten him on that occasion?"

"I may have."

"Answer my question. Did you?"

"Well, yes, I did."

"What did you say to him?"

"I don't remember."

"Again let me refresh your memory. Did you say—'You will come to a noose for this day's work'?"

"I may have said so."

"That won't do. Did you say that? Be careful now."

"M' lord, the witness says he can't remember," objected Mr. Benham. "He was angry at the time—under the circumstances, naturally so. We can't always remember words uttered in anger."

"It's of no consequence, m' lord. We can prove that he used the words. It would save time—and, perhaps, be better for himself—if he admitted it, though," said Mr. Windgate significantly.

"Well, I did say that," said Johnston sullenly.

"We know you did. Now, to what did you refer when you said that? Was it to this charge of murder?"

"It may have been."

"Answer the learned counsel properly, sir," blazed forth

the judge. "You are an impertinent fellow, to come here and play the fool in Court. Just be careful what you are about."

"I mean it was," answered Johnston, overawed.

"Quite so. In a word, you suspected that there had been foul play, and that your master was at the bottom of it?"

"Yes."

"Only a suspicion, of course?"

"Yes."

"Now, what gave rise to that suspicion?"

"Well, it seemed strange that Mr. Roland should be down at Battisford in disguise just at the time Mr. Hubert disappeared."

"Ah! How long were you in the service of the accused?"

"Nearly two years."

"Nearly two years in the service of a man you suspected of murder. I should say you had a most elastic conscience, Mr. Johnston, were it not that your conduct looks very like an attempt to extract hush money. Now, has your master ever had occasion to find fault with you previously?"

"He has once or twice said I must be more ceevil. He was a mighty partecklar gentleman."

"Quite so. And did you not, on a former occasion, attempt to take legal proceedings against the accused, because his dog bit you?"

"I did. But that was in the late General Dorrien's time."

"And you were not a favourite with the accused at any time?"

"Well—no."

"That I can easily understand," rejoined Mr. Windgate, with bitter significance. "The marvel is that he kept you for a single day."

"My learned friend is not justified in making such reflections on the witness," objected Mr. Benham.

"My learned friend need not mind. I have now done with this witness, and I devoutly thank Heaven for it," retorted Mr. Windgate.

"One moment, Johnston," said the Crown counsel.

"Have you ever in any way traded upon your suspicions to obtain money or favours from your employer?"

"Never. I solemnly swear."

There was a low hiss at the back of the room as Johnston left the box, which even the judge pretended not to hear.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A SCRAP OF PAPER.

In answer to a call for Mrs. Eliza Clack, a hatchet-faced harpy entered the box, and, the first diffidence over, tried all she knew to justify her patronymic. From this propensity, however, Mr. Benham managed to pick out the facts that she knew the prisoner, could swear to him anywhere, that he had lodged with her a couple of months two and a half years ago, and had left at a date which would be but the day before the deceased's disappearance. He owned a large red and white dog then, which he had disposed of while in her house. She had always thought him a strangely-mannered gentleman, and was not altogether sorry to see the last of him. He looked somewhat different then to what he did now, he wore a beard—and yes, now it was put to her, she thought he was getting a little grey at that time.

How could she remember the date? insisted Mr. Windgate, when his turn came. Well, she did remember it. Could swear to it, in fact. But two and a half years was a long time. Well, yes it was, but she remembered it by several things. It was the same night that the boy next door had blinded her tortoiseshell cat with a catapult. And it was the day before her daughter was turned away from her situation, well, never mind why—it wasn't true; an answer which sent a ripple of mirth through the room. However, the woman could swear to the prisoner, and swore tenaciously to the date, which was all the prosecution wanted.

Two maid-servants from "The Silver Fleece Inn" were the next witnesses. These testified to the time when Robert Durnford had gone out on the Sunday night, but were unable to state the hour of his return. One of them declared she had heard the stranger talking to the waiter in the hall at a quarter past ten, and that she thought she had heard the front door close just before. Upon her Mr. Windgate pounced.

"Your bed-room is at the top of the house?"

"Yes, sir. But the 'ouse isn't an 'igh one."

"I didn't ask you that. Now, how do you know it was a quarter past ten? Had you a watch?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you looked at it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was it keeping the right time?"

"Yes, sir. That is, I set it by the large clock in the passage."

"When?"

"The day before."

"Oh! You did, did you?"—making a note. "Now, had you been asleep at the time?"

"No, sir. I was just goin' to drop off when I heard gentlemen's voices in the passage."

"And who were the 'gentlemen'?"

"They was Mr. Durnford and Grainger, the waiter."

"Now you are on your oath," said Mr. Windgate impressively, fixing the witness with a stern look that nearly drove the luckless young woman wild with terror and apprehension. "Are you ready to swear that the voice you heard talking to—a—Grainger was that of Mr. Durnford?"

"Well, sir, I don't know about swearing, but I'm positive it was."

"Indeed. You are singularly confident, young woman," sarcastically. "But no matter. We shall soon show that, like most positive people, this witness is quite at fault. You are quite right not to swear. You may go."

"Stephen Devine."

There was a stir among the audience, and interest, which had begun to flag, now revived, as the hulking form of the ex-poacher appeared in the box. There was a decidedly hang-dog look on his swarthy face, not unmixed with fear, and he took the Book as if it would burn him. But his evidence was straightforward enough. In the examination he stated how, while returning home from Wandsborough on the night in question, he had unexpectedly caught sight of Hubert Dorrien hurrying in a direction which could have led him nowhere in particular. This, added to the fact that it was a Sunday evening, rendered the young man's movements not a little suspicious, and the

witness determined to watch him. Accordingly he followed him at a distance to the brow of the cliff above Smugglers' Ladder. It must have been a little after nine, for he distinctly heard the hour strike from Wandsborough steeple—to that he could positively swear. To his surprise he heard another man's voice, and on stealing a little nearer he recognised it as that of the prisoner, Roland Dorrien. So he hid behind a stone and waited. He was not quite near enough to catch what they said, but the deceased seemed rather frightened. But what puzzled the witness most was that although he could swear to the voice, no less than to the figure, the face was strange to him. It was bright moonlight at the time. At last the prisoner turned to the light, and his brother, recognising him, at once exclaimed "Roland!" and then the witness was able to see that he seemed in a manner disguised. He, Devine, afterwards saw him twice in Battisford—once from the window of a public-house and once from a shop door, and easily recognised him.

When the deceased had identified his brother he seemed less frightened, and soon they got to high words. Then there was a struggle, and in a moment the prisoner had thrown the deceased into the chasm. The witness lay quite still, and saw the prisoner go and look down into the chasm for a moment, after which he went away in the direction of Battisford. Then his statement before the magistrate, Mr. Forsyth, was put in as in Johnston's case.

Great sensation prevailed during this narrative. Those who had been consulting their watches with an eye to dinner—for it was getting late—elected to stay. The case might be finished to-night.

Then came Mr. Windgate's turn. His cross-examination was perfect. Every point in the witness' past life, which he could colourably touch upon—and several which he could not—was raised. He made him admit—notwithstanding continued objections from the prosecution—that his own daughter would not live with him, even if the unfortunate girl had not been fairly driven from her home. He brought up against him former convictions for acts of ruffianism, and for poaching; and on the score of character, and by way of proving *animus*, he forced

the witness to own that he had more than once expressed hatred of the accused, thus making him prove himself guilty of the blackest ingratitude, in that his situation with Colonel Neville had been procured through the prisoner's good offices. But clever as he was, Mr. Windgate could not get him to contradict himself or to swerve by a word from the main details of his story.

"Well, now," he continued. "This took place two years and a half ago. That is to say, Mr. Stephen Devine, that by witnessing this deed and not preventing it you made yourself an accessory after the fact? An accomplice—in short."

The man looked rather scared.

"Please, sir, it was all done too quickly."

"But why did you keep silence all this time?"

"Well, sir, you see, it was no affair of mine, and I was afraid I might get into trouble."

"Indeed! Suspicious, to say the least of it. And how is it that, having held your tongue for so long, you should at last see fit to let it wag?"

"Well, sir, you see Johnston, he knew about it too, and he kep' on a lettin' me know that he did. At last he said that we should both get into trouble if we kep' it dark any longer."

"Quite so. When was this?"

"About five weeks ago."

"And what did you do then?"

"Why, we went to Mr. Forsyth and asked his advice, and he said we'd better make sure of our fax, and then we must make a—a—a—aspersion."

"A what?"

"No, sir, that wasn't it—it was a disposition."

"Oh! A deposition?"

"Yes, sir, and we made it. And the next thing we heard was that Squire Dorrien was in gaol."

"Where I trust those who richly deserve it will soon be in his place," rejoined Mr. Windgate significantly. "And I hope I shall be instrumental in bringing about this pleasant little change. And now, do we understand you to say you would have kept silence about this if Johnston had not known it too?"

"Well, sir, yes. It warn't no business of mine."

"Well!" said Mr. Windgate in a tone which said, "After that—anything."

"A very natural fear, my lord," explained Mr. Benham. "A poor man like the witness would naturally think a good many times before bringing a grave charge of this sort against a gentleman in the prisoner's position."

"Many more witnesses on your side, Mr. Benham?" asked the judge. "It's getting very late."

"Only one, my lord. But I am willing to adjourn."

But Mr. Windgate was not. He argued that it was important to his client's interest that this witness should be heard to-night. The judge ordered lights to be brought in—for it was becoming dark—and then Jem Pollock was recalled.

There was a seriousness and a gravity upon the seafarer's weatherbeaten face which gave one the impression of a man there much against his will. Re-examined, he stated that he was returning home from Battisford on the night of the supposed murder, and took the short way over the cliffs to Minchkil Bay. As he approached Smuggers' Ladder a man passed him walking rapidly in the direction of Battisford. There was something familiar about the stranger's figure and gait, and when he, the witness, wished him good evening, he seemed to recognise the voice as he replied.

A few days after the search for the deceased, the witness had taken the trouble to go and examine the chasm again, and not many yards from it he found a fragment of an old envelope. Nearly the whole name was still on it—"Roland Dor— —don, W.," but the address was almost entirely gone. The date of the postmark was Jan. 19th. There was great excitement in Court as the envelope was produced and handed to the jury, and all eyes were bent on the prisoner to see how he would take it. But disappointment awaited. The accused seemed to manifest not the smallest interest in the proceedings.

This envelope Pollock had kept, waiting to be guided by events. But the stir attendant on Hubert Dorrien's disappearance soon quieted down, and he decided to keep his own counsel. Then had come another exciting event—the rector's daughter being cut off by the tide and narrowly escaping drowning. Witness had also taken part in the

search for the young lady, and in her rescuer he recognised the man who had passed him on the cliff. At the same time he recognised him for Roland Dorrien.

This bit of romance turned the tide of public opinion quite in favour of the accused, for the story of Olive Ingelow's narrow escape was well known. Surely, never was a criminal trial so redundant with romantic episode. Sympathetic murmurs began to arise in Court. But counsel's inexorable voice recalled to prose again.

"Could you swear to the prisoner being the man who rescued Miss Ingelow?"

"Yes, sir," replied the witness firmly, but very reluctantly.

"You saw his face distinctly?"

"Yes, sir. The lanterns was full upon it."

"And you knew his voice?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, how is it you kept silence about your suspicions?"

"Well, sir, I'm not one o' them as talks a lot. And then, I had no suspicions until the idea cropped up that Mr. Hubert had met wi' foul play. And I didn't want to injure Mr. Roland, and especially Madam," he added with feeling; "but that there detective chap he seemed to get it all out o' me like a blessed babby," concluded he resentfully.

"Quite so. Very natural. That will do," and Mr. Benham sat down.

But the prisoner's counsel realised that this witness was the most dangerous one of all. Any attempt to browbeat a man of Pollock's known respectability could not but damage his cause in the eyes of the jury. So he assumed a tone at once conciliatory and deprecatory, as though he would convey the idea that Pollock, though incapable of a false statement, might be mistaken in his inferences throughout.

"Of course, Pollock, you know Mr. Dorrien well now, but at that time you didn't know him very well, did you?"

"Well, I'd often seen him, sir, and I knew him well enough by sight. There was something about his walk, too, that I couldn't mistake.

"Indeed? But that is not a very sure point to go upon, is it?"

"That's as may be, sir."

"Now, Pollock, you are on good terms with Mr. Dorrien, are you not? You would not wish to injure him?"

"No, indeed, sir," answered the witness earnestly. "He's a kind landlord to us, is the Squire—and as for Madam, I've known her since she was a little maid not much higher nor my knee—bless her sweet face."

Great applause. Mr. Windgate began to look more and more confident.

"Quite so. Now, don't you think you may be mistaken in identifying the man who saved Miss Ingelow with the one you met on the cliff on the night of the disappearance of Hubert Dorrien?"

"M' lord, I must take exception most strongly to my learned brother's mode of cross-examination," said Mr. Benham. "He appeals most powerfully to the feelings of the witness, and then does what is tantamount to begging him to unsay what he has already stated on oath."

"Hardly that, I submit," rejoined the other. "My unfortunate client is placed in a very grave position. Surely then it behoves us to make certain as to our facts."

"But the witness had already stated on oath his certitude as to the identity of the men."

"A man may excusably think twice when such grave issues are at stake, Mr. Benham," said the judge.

"With the greatest respect I would submit that your lordship is laying down a somewhat dangerous precedent," answered Mr. Benham, undaunted.

Then the judge retorted, and after some triangular sparring between his lordship and the two counsel, Mr. Windgate went on.

"What time would it have been when you met the stranger on the cliff that evening?"

"It was after nine, sir. Indeed, it was nearly half-past —for very soon after I heard the clock strike."

"What clock?"

"The Wandsborough clock."

"How far from—er—Smugglers' Ladder was the stranger when you met him?"

"Maybe half a mile, sir."

"How long would it take to walk from Smugglers' Ladder to Battisford? Walking at one's fastest?"

"About thirty-five minutes. It might be done in thirty minutes—not in less."

"Then this man whom you met on the cliff, within half a mile of Smugglers' Ladder, at nearly half-past nine, could not by any possibility have reached Battisford by five-and-twenty minutes to ten?"

"Not possible, sir—even if he ran all the way," repeated the witness firmly.

"Quite so, thank you," said Mr. Windgate. "A—one more question. Did you ever mention to anyone—any of your neighbours, for instance—having recognised, as you thought, Mr. Dorrien in this stranger?"

"Not a word of it, sir."

"That's the case for the Crown, my lord," said Mr. Benham, rising as the witness left the box.

With a sigh of relief, the judge rose and left the bench. It was past nine, and his lordship was very hungry and proportionately irritable, for judges are mortal—very much so too.

The Court room emptied fast, many turning to take a parting look at the prisoner as they went out, speculating and laying odds for or against his chances of acquittal. It was ominous, however, that public opinion leaned considerably towards a conviction. But then, the defence had yet to be heard.

And the wretched man himself? He was conducted back to his cell, another night of suspense before him. Outwardly, his proud self-possession remained unshaken, but once within those cold, gloomy walls, alone and unseen by any human eye, a groan of the bitterest anguish escaped him as he sank despondently upon his bed. The web of Fate was closing in about him; to battle with it further was useless.

Throughout that night, a dismal sound smote upon the ears of the dwellers in the neighbourhood of the gaol, a sound of weird and mournful howling, where, upright upon his haunches, in the open space before the frowning portcullis of the prison, sat a large dog—his head in the air and his eyes lifted to the pale, cold moon, pouring forth his piteous lamentations. The prisoner heard it too.

"Dear old dog," he murmured to himself. "Dear, faithful old Roy!"

CHAPTER XLV.

"IS HE ROBERT DURNFORD?"

WHEN the Court met again next morning there was no abatement in the attendance of the public; if anything, it was increased, for it was pretty well known that the verdict would be given to-day.

Mr. Windgate was in his place, smiling, cheerful, and cracking small jokes with the juniors, as if he would convince everybody—judge, jury, audience, and prisoner—that he considered his case already won and the remainder of the proceedings a mere formality, unhappily necessary to ensure his client an honourable acquittal.

As for the case for the Crown, he said, it was fortunate they had come to an end of it at last—but fortunate in this sense only, that from beginning to end it had been a sheer wasting of the time of the Court, and specially of the valuable time of the twelve intelligent gentlemen before him. That being so, he proposed, himself, to be as brief as possible. His defence would be very short, so short indeed as at first blush to appear inadequate. But what could be more inadequate than the case for the prosecution! He would simply remind the jury of two things. One was that his unfortunate client, actuated by the most considerate of motives—the delicacy of character of a true gentleman—had chosen rather to impair his defence than to drag into this Court friends or relatives to whom such an attendance must necessarily be most painful. The other was that the whole case turned simply upon a question of identity. He would hardly so much as mention such trumpery points, which were not even circumstantial, though they might seem to be. What are they? A matchbox, a time-table, and a bit of paper. However, to put such trivialities out of the account, we have left only this question of identity, and that I shall have no difficulty in disposing of, entirely to your satisfaction. I shall call—

"Joseph Grainger."

The public, unaccustomed to the persuasive powers and

self-confidence of forensic eloquence, began to think at the conclusion of Mr. Windgate's speech that the result of the trial was not such a foregone thing after all, and there was yet more exciting uncertainty in store for it. It, therefore, prepared itself to listen eagerly.

"You are head waiter at 'The Silver Fleece Inn,' at Battisford?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long have you held that position?"

"Nigh upon seven year, sir."

"Look at the prisoner. Do you know him?"

"Yes, sir. It's Squire Dorrien."

"When did you first see him?"

"Well, sir, I can't exactly remember that. It was shortly after the General's death. Lawyer Barnes, he comes to our place, and he says to my guv'nor, says he——"

"Tut-tut-tut. Not so fast, my good friend," interrupted Mr. Windgate smilingly, while a ripple of mirth ran through the public. "Never mind about Lawyer Barnes, but just tell us when you first saw Mr. Dorrien?"

"Well, sir, as far as I can remember, it was soon after he was married—just about Christmas-time."

"Ah!" said Mr. Windgate triumphantly, making a rapid note. "And you never saw him before he was married?"

"No, sir."

"Will you swear to that?"

"To the best of my belief, sir."

"Very good. And have you seen him often since?"

"Not very often, sir. You see, he don't come much over to Battisford, and I don't go much over to Cranston——"

"Quite so. Now, do you remember a Mr. Robert Durnford coming to stay at 'The Silver Fleece'?"

"Yes, sir—well."

"When did he come?"

"He came—let me see—it was on a Saturday evening. I remember it, because it was the day before Mr. Hubert Dorrien was lost."

"Now what sort of person was this Mr. Durnford? Just describe him."

"A very nice, pleasant-spoken gentleman, and quite the gentleman," and then the loquacious one launched into a voluminous description of the stranger, which made the audience laugh and the judge knit his brows and mutter impatiently.

"How long did he stay at 'The Silver Fleece'?"

"Rather over a fortnight, sir."

"Have you ever seen him since?"

"No, sir."

"But if you did you would know him again—in a moment?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Now look at the accused."

Grainger complied. The eyes of the witness and the prisoner met. In those of the latter there was indifference—in those of the former there was no recognition.

"Is he the same man as the man you knew as Robert Durnford?"

The loquacious one's homely features expanded into a broad grin.

"Law bless you, no, sir. He ain't in the least like him."

Mr. Windgate could have danced with relief.

"He isn't in the least like him," he repeated emphatically, for the benefit of the jury. As for Roland himself, the first gleam of light since his arrest a month ago now darted in upon the rayless gloom of his soul. "—Except—" The witness checked himself suddenly and with an effort. He could have bitten his tongue out. For Mr. Benham had looked up quickly and was now making a note. Mr. Windgate thought it better to let him go on.

"Except what?" he said playfully.

"I was goin' to say, sir, leastways I was only thinking, sir," answered the witness, stammering with confusion, "except it might be the way in which he stands."

Mr. Benham went on making his notes. His opponent's feeling of relief was dashed, and the prisoner could have groaned aloud in the revulsion.

Then the witness in his roundabout way gave a voluble account of how the stranger had gone over to attend Wandsborough church, and had returned earlier than he

was expected; and how he had come in while he—Grainger—was dozing.

"What time did he return?"

"It was after half-past nine."

"How much after?"

"Five minutes."

"You are positive as to this?"

"Oh, yes, sir—I said to the gentleman as how he'd come back very quick, 'cos they don't come out o' church till after half-past eight, and it's over an hour's walk at least. I asked him if he'd come by the way of the cliffs, and he didn't seem to know there was a way by the cliffs as was shorter."

Mr. Windgate frowned slightly, and internally anathematised the witness' garrulity.

"Anyhow, you are ready to swear it was five-and-twenty minutes to ten when this Mr. Durnford came in?"

"Yes, sir—quite certain. We both looked at the clock and remarked it."

"But one of the servants, a—" consulting his notes—"a Jane Flinders, says it was later."

The loquacious one shook his head with a smile of pitying superiority.

"Law bless you, sir! Them gals is always a-fancyin' things. They ought to have bin a-bed and asleep. No, no, sir. It wasn't any more than five-and-twenty to ten."

"This gentleman stayed at 'The Silver Fleece' a fortnight, you say. Now, during all that time did you notice anything strange about him?"

"Well, sir, he used to go about with a little hammer, chippin' off bits o' stone from the cliffs and suchlike, and in the evenin' he'd sit in his room and write a good deal."

"Did you talk with him at all on the subject of Mr. Hubert Dorrien's disappearance?"

"Yes, sir. I was the first to tell him of it."

"Oh! And how did he seem to take it?"

"Cool as a blessed cucumber, sir. And when I told him that the ghost had been seen on The Skegs, he laughed in my face outright and said it was all humbug."

"Ha-ha! Of course. Thank you, Grainger. That'll do. Er—one more question. Do you know the place called Smugglers' Ladder?"

"Well, sir, I've been there."

"How long does it take to walk there from Battisford?"

"Three-quarters of an hour."

"Ah! Now, you mentioned a cliff path leading from Wandsborough. Would that lead one past Smugglers' Ladder?"

"Oh, no, sir. Nowhere near it. Why, it turns inland before you come within half a mile of Smugglers' Ladder."

"Thank you."

"Wait a moment, please," said Mr. Benham suavely, as Grainger was about to leave the box. "You say this Robert Durnford came to stay at 'The Silver Fleece' the day before Hubert Dorrien was lost. That was on a Saturday evening. Did you at any time between that and Sunday evening have any conversation with him about the Dorrien family?"

The prisoner's head sank lower and lower. That devil of a counsel!

"Well sir, we did."

"Kindly repeat it."

"Well, sir, as far as I can remember, the gentleman said he'd known the old Squire, the General's brother. First he asked whose the house was, an' then we got talkin', and I told him a little about the General—just quietly and between ourselves, like."

"Quite so. And what else did you tell him?"

"Well, sir, I told him a little about the young Squire being in difficulties with his father—not meanin' any 'arm to anybody," went on the man piteously, and with a penitent glance towards the dock.

"No, no. Of course not. People do talk of these things," said Mr. Benham encouragingly—then waxing impressive. "Now, did you mention a girl named Lizzie Devine?"

"Oh Lord, sir," cried poor Grainger, horror-stricken, staring open-mouthed at the placid face of the inquisitorial counsel and wondering how the deuce he had ferreted out all this. "I didn't mean no harm, but we was just a-talkin' quietly like." Then little by little Mr. Benham inexorably elicited from the unwilling and terrified witness, the whole of the conversation that had passed between himself and Robert Durnford on the subject, and how he had told the

stranger that Hubert Dorrien had blackened his brother's name for his own advantage.

"Now, when Mr. Durnford returned from Wandsborough that evening, you were asleep?"

"Yes, sir. I had just dropped off."

"Where?"

"In the coffee-room."

"And where was Durnford standing when you woke up?"

"In the door."

"The door of the coffee-room?"

"Yes."

"You mention a clock in the passage. Where does it stand?"

"It stands—you've seen it, sir."

"No matter, my friend. The jury haven't."

"Well, sir, it stands about half way between the front door and the door of the coffee-room."

"So that Durnford, to reach the coffee-room door, would have to pass that clock?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you did not wake till he was standing in the coffee-room door?"

"No, sir."

"How high is the face of that clock from the ground? Can you reach it without standing on anything?"

"Oh, yes. Quite easily."

"Was Durnford a taller man than yourself?"

"Yes, sir. At least a head taller."

"Does the face of that clock open easily?"

"Quite easily. I open it every few days to wind it."

"Did that clock keep good time after that evening?"

"I don't remember, sir," answered the witness, after a moment of earnest thought.

"No matter. Jane Flinders swears it was a quarter-past ten by her watch, when she heard Durnford come in. You swear it was five-and-twenty minutes to ten. How do you reconcile the difference?"

"I don't know. She must be mistaken."

"But so may you be."

The witness was silent.

"Now, has it never occurred to you that that clock may

have been tampered with? The hands put back half an hour or so, while you were asleep?" asked Mr. Benham, bending forward and fixing a piercing glance on the witness' face.

"Oh Lord! sir. No, it never did."

"But still the thing might have been done—while you were asleep?"

"It's not impossible, sir."

"It's not impossible. And now—look at the prisoner."

The light was full upon Roland's face, and again his eyes met those of the witness. Grainger started and stared. His face was a study. He looked like a man upon whom a new and unexpected light had irresistibly dawned.

"Oh Lord!" he ejaculated dazedly.

"Now," went on Mr. Benham, in his most inquisitorial tone, "will you stand there and swear that the prisoner is not the man who was staying at 'The Silver Fleece,' under the name of Robert Durnford."

"M' lord!" cried Mr. Windgate, "I have made a special note of the fact that the witness has already distinctly sworn to that very thing. I must protest emphatically against my learned brother trying to intimidate the witness into making a most unwarrantable contradiction of his former statement."

"And I must equally protest against these repeated imputations," retorted Mr. Benham.

"The prosecution is quite in order, Mr. Windgate," ruled the judge. "Let us continue."

"There is—there is a look of Durnford about him," blunderingly admitted the witness.

"A very similar look? On your oath, mind."

"Well—he stands like him, and—and—his head—is like him," stammered the unfortunate man.

"Will you swear that he is not the man that you knew as Robert Durnford? Yes or no?"

"No, sir."

"Thank you. By the bye, when did this Durnford leave 'The Silver Fleece'?"

"It was the day after he and Miss Ingelow were cut off by the tide."

"Did he leave suddenly?"

"Yes, quite suddenly. He just came in—packed up his things and caught the morning train for London."

"Didn't that strike you as rather strange?"

"Oh, no, sir. We didn't know he had been out all night. It was only after he'd gone that we heard what happened. Dr. Ingelow—that's the rector o' Wandsborough—he came over to 'The Silver Fleece' in the afternoon, and was in a great state because the gentleman had gone."

"That'll do, Grainger. You may stand down."

Very black for the prisoner were things looking now. The jury wore an unusually grave expression of countenance, and even among the audience all levity was hushed in the intense anxiety attendant on the dread issue.

"Unless Windgate can prove an alibi, he's done," whispered a sporting junior to another. "Take you two to one on it in sovs. if you like, Rogers."

"Dunno. Think I won't. Isn't it rather queer form to bet on a fellow's life," was the reply.

Although the remark was unheard by him, it exactly rendered Mr. Windgate's reflections. That damning recognition—or half-recognition—of Grainger's had simply lost the case, and he would have given much had it never been made. For he was on his mettle now. The case was a highly sensational one—just the thing to put a crowning point on his reputation if he had come out of it successfully, but now 'that infernal Benham' had been too sharp for him. Just one of his ferrety ideas, that about the clock being tampered with—and in this instance Windgate was shrewd enough to see that it had told with fatal effect. He wished again and again he had not been fool enough to undertake the defence of a man who would give him simply nothing to go upon. And he could not even prove an alibi.

The next witness was Brown, the verger of Wandsborough church. His evidence was short and straightforward. He had a recollection of a stranger coming into church on the evening in question, towards the middle of the service. He certainly never thought of recognising Mr. Dorrien in him, nor had he since. He knew Mr. Dorrien well, too—he often attended Wandsborough church. It must have been considerably earlier than

half-past eight when the stranger came in, because the service on ordinary Sunday evenings was nearly always over by that time. As to distances and times, he, Brown, could not speak. He was an old man now, and never had been much of a walker. The only thing he could be positive about was that the stranger had left the church a little before half-past eight, and he certainly had no suspicion that it was Mr. Dorrien, either at the time, or since.

Him the prosecution declined to cross-examine.

"I shall call the Rev. Laurence Turner," said Mr. Windgate.

The curate had not been at first subpœnaed. But so urgent had become the need of more testimony that the defence had decided at the last moment to put Turner into the box. The latter looked not a little nervous. Truth to tell, the situation was one of horror to his immaculate soul. He did not fancy being mixed up in criminal trials, as he subsequently put it.

"Now, Mr. Turner," went on Mr. Windgate, after a few preliminary questions. "I believe you took part in the search for Miss Olive Ingelow, who was cut off by the tide on this coast some two-and-a-half years ago?"

"Yes, I did."

"And you found her?"

"We were so fortunate."

"Kindly tell the Court how and where you found her."

Turner complied in as few words as possible.

"Now, did it strike you that this stranger you mention—this person who rescued the young lady, might have been Mr. Roland Dorrien disguised?"

"Never."

"Never? Then or since?"

"Neither then nor since," answered Turner decidedly.

"Did you ever hear that it struck anybody?"

"Never."

"Yet you knew Roland Dorrien well?"

"Fairly well."

"Dr. Ingelow, the lady's father, took part in the search, did he not?"

"Yes."

"And he remarked no likeness?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"You saw a great deal of Dr. Ingelow at that time?"

"Yes."

"And he never mentioned any such suspicion?"

"Never."

"One moment, Mr. Turner," said the Crown counsel, rising to cross-examine. "This lady is now the prisoner's wife, is she not?"

"She is."

"Didn't it strike you as rather—well, queer—the stranger Durnford suddenly leaving you all in the way he did?"

"A little perhaps. But we supposed he knew his own business best. And some people *are* queer."

"A—quite so—Mr. Turner, I quite agree with you—they are," said Mr. Benham waggishly. "That will do, thank you."

"That's my defence, my lord," said Mr. Windgate.

CHAPTER XLVI.

LIFE OR DOOM ?

THE prisoner, re-entering after the adjournment for lunch, found himself idly wondering whether, when next he should pass through the dock gate, it would be as a free man or as one whose days were numbered. Then, amid the intense hush that followed on his appearance, he heard his counsel opening his address to the jury, which, put into a good humour by a few deft if stereotyped compliments, began to think that after all there might be a good deal to be said on the side of the defence.

Before brushing aside the flimsy testimony which seemed to tell against the accused, for the prosecution had relied upon quantity to counterbalance an utter absence of quality, began Mr. Windgate, he would show what manner of man it was whom they were asked to convict of the gravest crime known to the law. It was all very well for the prosecution to contend that a gentleman in his client's position was as liable to commit crime as—say the historic Mr. William Sikes. His own experience—perhaps fully equal to that of his learned brother opposite—was wholly against any such theory.

Then Mr. Windgate launched forth into a brilliant panegyric of the accused, extolling his virtues in every capacity, public and private. Then he proceeded to deal with the evidence bit by bit, and as this involved a long repetition of all that has gone before, we shall not follow him through it. Suffice it to say that he handled his points with consummate skill.

When he came to Johnston his scorn was beautiful to behold. This fellow, who had eaten the bread of the accused and of his father before him for a number of years, had gone into the box with the most bare-faced and unblushing effrontery, and confessed to having played the part of a crawling serpent, a part whose loathsomeness, he, Mr. Windgate, could find no terms adequately to stigmatise. What could the evidence of such a creature be worth? Why, nothing—less than nothing. But it was

abundantly shown that the fellow harboured the greatest ill-will towards his master, who had frequently found fault with him for incivility, which, judging from his impudent demeanour in Court, was little to be wondered at. Then when he had grossly insulted his master's wife, Mr. Dorrien, very rightly in the speaker's opinion, had discharged him summarily. So he swore to be revenged on his master—threatened him, as they had heard. A pretty witness this, to swear away a man's life! Justice in England must be coming very low if such instruments as this could be capable of swaying her course. But, as a matter of fact, such was not the case. He could tell them that it was intended to institute proceedings against Johnston for wilful perjury, but that was by the way.

As for Devine, here, too, was a tainted witness, a corrupt witness, in fact. He, too, was known to bear a strong grudge against the accused, which, considering that he owed his comfortable place to Mr. Dorrien's influence—which his employer, it was to be hoped, would not suffer him to retain—was quite sufficient to show what sort of person he was. This precious rascal, then, had come into Court with a cock-and-bull story about witnessing a crime at Smugglers' Ladder. Why, it was the most bare-faced, as well as clumsy, attempt at a diabolical conspiracy ever known—diabolical, because without motive, unless the motive were to shield himself, for if he, Devine, was there at all at that hour, his own presence needed explaining. It sickened him, Mr. Windgate, to think that it was even necessary to defend such a case—a case bolstered up mainly by two witnesses of infamous character, whose evidence, even if true, was that of midnight spies. Who saw Devine at Smugglers' Ladder at all that night, and what is the bare statement of a man of Devine's record worth? Not the millionth fraction of a farthing.

After heaping up a good deal more denunciatory scorn upon these two and their testimony, he came to Pollock's evidence. He had no wish to impute *mala fides* to a man of known honesty. Still, honest men were mistaken sometimes. This matter of identity rested upon evidence very shadowy. As to recognising the accused when he saw Durnford by lamplight on the beach, he, the speaker, prayed them to receive this statement with the greatest

possible reserve. Here was the rector of Wandsborough and his curate, Mr. Turner, both of whom were far better acquainted with the accused's appearance than the witness Pollock, yet both these gentlemen had unhesitatingly sworn not only that they utterly failed to identify the prisoner in Robert Durnford, but that the barest suspicion as to such identity had never crossed their minds—and had not done so from that day to this. And further—here he begged the jury to give him all their attention—the lady rescued by Durnford was Dr. Ingelow's daughter. She was at that time, to her credit be it said, something more than interested in his client, whose wife she subsequently became, a fact which precluded her from giving valuable evidence on Mr. Dorrien's behalf. Was it likely then, he asked, that this estimable lady would have kept silence these two years and a half as to who her rescuer really was—that she should never have mentioned the fact to her own father, with whom she had ever been on the most dutiful and affectionate terms? Why, of course it was not. He put it to them as sensible men—fathers themselves, most probably—and so on.

"By Jove! Windgate's scored a point there, Rogers," whispered the sporting junior. "If only he can squash the envelope business!"

But this was just what he could not—and Mr. Windgate knew it himself. He tried his best though, as also with the other damning points. At last his speech came near its close.

The evidence, he continued, consisted of a series of mere coincidences—one or two of them, it might be, a little remarkable, but—coincidences. The time had gone by in this country, he thanked Heaven, when men were convicted on purely circumstantial evidence. As for the motive which the prosecution had evolved, it was, he made bold to say, the veriest mare's nest. Why, several of the most reliable witnesses had stated on oath that there was no ill-will between the two brothers, and that on the whole they were on good terms. He was not there to defend the absent Durnford, since it was abundantly proved that with that mysterious personage his client had nothing whatever to do, but he would just remark that in the conflicting evidence in the matter of the hall clock and the

maid-servant's watch, it was merely oath against oath—and that nothing was more confusing than differences in time. The witness Grainger had utterly failed to identify the accused. Under the prosecution's very bewildering cross-examination he had, it was true, been afflicted with a temporary misgiving, but that was perfectly natural under the circumstances. So against two rogues, and one honest man, who could not be quite sure as to his statements, they had the positive evidence of Dr. Ingelow and Mr. Turner against the identity. That was to say, the two witnesses in this case to whom the accused had always been best known. And all the side evidence made for his client.

"Gentlemen," he concluded, in his most impressive manner, "I now call upon you honourably to acquit my client. Remember, with you rests the most awful responsibility which can be laid upon the shoulders of mortal men—the life or death of a fellow-creature. You must either honourably acquit him or doom him to an ignominious death. There is no middle course—absolutely none."

"Good old phrase that," muttered the sporting junior, chuckling inwardly over the scared look on the wooden faces of the twelve intelligent Englishmen.

"—Therefore, I call upon you to record your true sentiments, the sentiments of upright and true Englishmen, and to acquit with honour my client, to restore a wronged but high-minded gentleman to his family—to a fond wife, whose affliction during these terrible weeks I dare not imagine—to that neighbourhood which is anxiously waiting to receive him back with acclamation—to a long, benevolent, and useful life, which he has already begun most signally to adorn.

"Gentlemen, I leave my client in your hands with perfect confidence as to the result."

A few moments of silence, and then the Crown counsel, who had been, to all outward appearance, intently studying his brief, rose.

The prisoner in the dock, he proceeded to say, was of a class whose members, happily, in this country, seldom filled that unfortunate position. He was a gentleman of affluence, more or less known to them all, and holding a

high and influential station. They might reason that on that account, if any man was free from all temptation to such a crime as the one under their consideration, that man would be the prisoner before them. But this was precisely what they must not do. He, the learned counsel, could assure them that human nature in this respect was marvellously similar. All his experience—and it had not been inconsiderable—went to confirm him in that opinion. —And so on.

Then he proceeded to draw a graphic and rather harrowing picture of the disappearance of the deceased and the terrible blow to the feelings of his relatives which this re-opening of their grief must prove, going on to dissect the evidence bit by bit.

"The identity of the prisoner with the stranger known as Robert Durnford is as clear as daylight," proceeded Mr. Benham. "You will notice that the persons who saw through this disguise were those to whom he was or had n best known. Andrew Johnston, an old family ser-t, recognised him at once. Stephen Devine, formerly abourer on the Cranston estate, and since gamekeeper o Colonel Neville—both these men had had abundant opportunities of being acquainted with the prisoner's pearance. Their suspicions aroused, they took further occasion to observe the so-called Durnford, with the result that those suspicions were fully confirmed. To this they had sworn—again and again. Then there is James Pollock, a man of the greatest respectability—to him Roland Dorrien was not so well known as to the other witnesses mentioned, yet, being a man of keen perceptions, he had recognised him. Not the first time, indeed—though even then the voice had struck upon his ears as familiar. But on the second occasion of their being brought together, meeting with the so-called Durnford on the occasion of Miss Olive Ingelow's rescue from drowning, he saw through his disguise at a glance, and in the man he had met coming away from Smugglers' Ladder, between nine and half-past on the evening of the murder, he recognised the prisoner, Roland Dorrien. Now here are three persons who distinctly swear to the identity between these two. Nor is that all. There is Joseph Grainger, the waiter at 'The Silver Fleece,' at the time of Durn-

ford's stay at that inn. He comes here. He sees the prisoner in his normal costume and wearing his ordinary aspect, and he does not recognise him—at first. Indeed, he even goes so far as to emphasize the statement. But memory will not be cheated. As he stands there, the striking similarity of the accused to the pseudo-Durnford recalls itself to his mind, and he is dumbfounded. Gentlemen, you saw him—his air of utter astonishment, almost of awe, as he looked at the prisoner. You witnessed his refusal to swear to the two men being different. That is enough. Sensible men like yourselves can draw but one inference.

"Now as to the time at which Durnford returned to 'The Silver Fleece,' there is a conflict of testimony, but a perfectly reconcilable one. The waiter swears to the guest's return at five-and-twenty minutes to ten. The maid-servant, Jane Flinders, swears with equal certitude to hearing Durnford come in at a quarter-past ten, and more than half the issue turns on this point. But, gentlemen, bear this in mind. The waiter Grainger was asleep. When he awoke, Durnford had already *passed* the hall clock, which then marked the hour of nine thirty-five. Durnford could reach the clock, be it remembered. But he could not reach Jane Flinders' watch. Gentlemen, you will draw your own conclusions. One more point in connection with this. Pollock's evidence proves that he met the stranger on the cliff, close to Smugglers' Ladder, at half-past nine. But the stranger is back in his hotel at Battisford by five-and-twenty minutes to ten. That is to say, he covers in five or ten minutes a distance which it has been proved by the most competent testimony could hardly be covered in five-and-thirty. And then, when Grainger asks him if he returned by way of the cliffs, he appears surprised, and would have the other believe him unaware of there being any way by the cliffs.

"My learned friend here has seen fit to make merry over the articles which infallibly connect the prisoner with this mournful tragedy, but these articles, small, trivial though they may be in themselves, are of the very last importance First, there is the A.B.C. time-table. Roland Dorrien goes into a tavern in the Strand, looking very strange and excited, and asks for an A.B.C. It is purchased for him.

He searches it, marks the Wandsborough train, turns down a corner of the page and—leaves the book behind him when he goes out. This is about a week before the murder—the waiter, Newton, cannot be sure of the date. But—and observe this—the very train marked in that time-table is the one by which Robert Durnford arrives at Battisford. On the 21st January Roland Dorrien gives up his lodgings at Mrs. Clack's. He leaves London early in the morning. Late in the afternoon of that day Robert Durnford arrives at Battisford. From that time until he leaves Wandsborough church on the night of the 22nd, Durnford's movements are accounted for. Then, passing over for the moment Devine's evidence, he is met by James Pollock coming away from Smugglers' Ladder, not many minutes after Hubert Dorrien is—well 'falls' into that chasm. And on the very scene of the tragedy James Pollock picks up this envelope which has been handed to you, directed—not to Robert Durnford but undoubtedly to Roland Dorrien. And where? At a London address incontestably. And the address subsequently given to Dr. Ingelow by the pseudo-Durnford is a London postal address. Now for the matchbox. The day after the deceased's disappearance, Eustace Ingelow, the prisoner's brother-in-law, a young gentleman who by common knowledge is devoted to his relative, and not likely knowingly to injure him in any way, picks up this matchbox, which is of peculiar make, and to which he can swear as being the prisoner's property. Where does he find this article? Why, at the bottom of this chasm, at the very spot where the deceased met his death.

"And now you will ask what motive could have been strong enough to lead this man to the black and abhorrent crime of fratricide. Well, even here the network of evidence is as complete as elsewhere. That motive, gentlemen, the prosecution has been able to supply. It has been shown that the prisoner had quarrelled with his father, and was in fact disinherited. Herein," continued the learned counsel, putting on his most sad and sorrowful expression, "came the passion of jealousy. Furthermore, he had found reason to suppose, from some most deplorable and unguarded statements on the part of Grainger, that his brother had dealt him a blow which, if true, amounted to a

stab in the dark—in that he had set to work to damage his reputation in Wandsborough and the neighbourhood. This being so, what more likely than that a man of the prisoner's temper and character should at once seek to be revenged? How he and his brother had come together was just one of those unimportant links in the dark chain which it was beyond their power to connect. The important fact was that they had come together—the evidence of Stephen Devine and others was amply sufficient to establish that."

Then Mr. Benham proceeded to comment on the evidence of Devine, who with his own eyes had seen the deed done. He explained away the witness' reluctance to divulge it during these years as a perfectly natural thing; laid stress on the straightforwardness and ring of truth which characterised the man's statement, and how his tale in its plain, unvarnished simplicity had more than triumphantly stood the test of his learned brother's most skilful cross-examination. In short, he drew the web of damning circumstances closer and closer around the accused, till there was not a flaw in the enthralling network. Then, with some conventional rhetoric about "terrible charge," "man in prisoner's position," "truly painful duty which, painful as it was, he dared not shirk," the heart-broken Mr. Benham resumed his seat, complacently conscious of having earned his not unhandsome fee.

Then the judge began to sum up.

The learned counsel for the prosecution, he said, had very properly impressed upon the jury that they must lose sight of any such side issue as class-distinction, and form their opinion of the case by the light of hard, cold reason and the dry facts of the evidence. That evidence they had had put before them in the most careful and patient manner, and it was his own especial function, said his lordship, to explain the law on the subject of such of it as appeared conflicting.

For upwards of an hour the judge continued, weighing the arguments of both counsel in calm, dispassionate and masterly fashion. But whether his lordship was against the prisoner or not, it puzzled the public to discern. His charge was a pattern of impartiality no less than of lucidity. But the substance of it was now adverse, now favourable.

One of the most regrettable features of the trial, continued his lordship, was that there had been next to no defence whatever. No attempt had been made to prove an *alibi*. If the prisoner had not been near the neighbourhood at the time of his brother's disappearance, surely there should be no great difficulty in obtaining evidence to that effect. But no such evidence had been put forward. The question of identity played a very important part indeed in this case. If the jury believed the evidence of Johnston, Devine and Pollock, they would consider the identity proved. But Johnston was a discharged servant, and the evidence of such against a former employer was always to be received with extreme caution, and in his case the greatest animus was shown to have been entertained by him against the prisoner. Devine was a man of notoriously bad character, but he appears to have had no real motive for injuring the accused. But James Pollock was altogether different from both of these witnesses. He was a man of the highest respectability; a man of keen intelligence, resource and courage, in short, a type of that most admirable body of men, the seafaring toilers of our coasts. This man then had seen through the disguise of the pseudo-Durnford, and under it had seen the identity of the prisoner, Roland Dorrien. The piece of envelope put forward, bearing as it did nearly the complete name of the prisoner, and part of a London address, was to his lordship's mind the completing link in the chain of identity.

Down went the hopes of the prisoner's friends, down to zero. The judge was summing up dead against him.

"To turn again to Stephen Devine," went on his lordship. "Here is a man who testifies to witnessing with his own eyes the perpetration of a deliberate act of murder. Alone, and in the dead of night, he stands as a spectator of this terrible deed—then calmly walks away, and for upwards of two years keeps silent on the subject. As the learned counsel for the defence has aptly pointed out, before you can convict a man of a murder you must be quite sure that a murder has been committed. The question is, are you quite sure on this point? That the dead man, Hubert Dorrien, met his end in the place known as Smugglers' Ladder, has been established beyond a doubt. But how did he get in there? Did he fall in, or was he pushed in?

If there is any doubt in your minds upon that head, why then, gentlemen, you are not merely entitled, but are bound to give the accused the benefit of it. You have evidence in plenty that the prisoner was near the spot—that is, to my mind, clear beyond dispute. But that he pushed his brother into this cleft you have the evidence of but a single eye-witness, and that witness, to my mind, a tainted one."

Now the hope of an acquittal ran high. The judge was again favourable to the accused all along the line, it seemed. As for the prisoner himself, for the second time a ray of hope dawned within his soul, only to be dashed as before.

If then, continued his lordship, they believed the evidence of Devine, they would convict the prisoner; if they disbelieved that evidence they would acquit him. There was no middle course. What had been a long and elaborate trial had, after all, winnowed itself down to a very simple issue, and that was the trustworthiness, or the reverse, of one witness, because upon that, and that alone, depended whether any murder had been committed at all.

So now, being in possession of all the facts of the case, his lordship trusted that they would most carefully confer among themselves and return their verdict according to the solemn oath they had taken—without fear, favour or affection.

The jury retired to their private room to deliberate, and once more the murmur of voices arose among the audience, but it was a very subdued one. The expectation—the awe of the moment—was upon that densely-packed throng, and for a while light and careless talk was hushed. Such conversation as there was bore upon the probable verdict, and it was the opinion of the audience that it would be an adverse one. Meanwhile the prisoner had been removed, pending the return of those who should decide his fate.

Half an hour went by, and at length the door opened. Ah—now for it! But no. One of the intelligent jurymen wished to ask his lordship whether in the event of them not being satisfied as to the identity, they could convict Durnford and acquit the prisoner. He was answered with exemplary patience, and the door closed again. The Bar

lifted its eyebrows—such of it as was able to keep from sniggering, that is.

The light of the setting sun streamed in at the windows, throwing its soft gleam upon the serried rows of anxious faces. And the accused—of what was he thinking? Was it of his beautiful home, which it was only too probable he would never enter again? Or was it of her whose first vows just such a golden sunbeam as this had fallen on and hallowed and witnessed?

At length the door opened a second time, and the jury came forth. It was noticeable that the prisoner, who had been hurriedly put back into the dock, did not even glance in their direction, but continued to look straight in front of him.

"Gentlemen, are you all agreed upon your verdict?"

"We are."

The official's voice had a vague, far-away ring in Roland's ears as it continued:

"How find you the prisoner? Guilty or Not Guilty?"

"We find him—Guilty."

CHAPTER XLVII.

"I HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY."

"GUILTY."

The fateful word rang through the room, producing something like a shuddering gasp among the close-packed audience. It rang in the brain of the prisoner, "Guilty! Dorrien of Cranston to be hanged—to be hanged by the neck until dead. Guilty!" Thus the hideous refrain danced through the wretched man's brain in clanging rhythm. And what he had gone through during the trial alone—apart from the period which had elapsed since his arrest—was sufficient expiation for a score of murders far more cold-blooded and deliberate than this, for it was as a thousand years of hell.

The most astonished person in the room, perhaps, as this verdict was given, was the judge himself; and forthwith his opinion of the intelligence of juries, at no time high, underwent a stride of improvement. This was an intelligent jury. For his lordship was as morally certain of the prisoner's guilt as though he had seen him perpetrate the homicide, yet how any jury could convict on the face of his summing up was a marvel. His trained mind had recognised that the evidence legally was not sufficient to hang a dog, and he had summed up accordingly, yet the jury had convicted. It now remained to pass the dread and only sentence of the law. Already his lordship was nervously fumbling with the black cap.

The prisoner felt as though shot through the head, as though a numbing, sledge-hammer blow had descended upon his faculties. Was this real, this sea of ghastly faces in the deathlike gloom of the ill-lighted hall, the grim, red-robed pronouncer of doom, now turning to face him? Was it real, or some terrible nightmare from which he would awaken directly with a thrill of horror combined with intense relief and thankfulness? Then he became dimly aware of an official voice asking if he had anything to say

why sentence of death should not be passed upon him. So dim did the voice sound to his wrought-up fancy that the question had to be repeated.

"No. Nothing," he answered, and the judge drew on the black cap.

"But *I* have. *I* have everything to say."

The voice rang out upon the dead silence, full, clear and feminine. From the back of the hall it came. Every head went round in that direction as though turned with the same wire.

"Let that woman be removed instantly," said the judge, whose experience was not devoid of similar cases of interruption on the part of some hysterically disposed female, worked up to exaltation pitch.

"You cannot remove me until you have heard me," went on the voice, calm, firm, and without a quaver; its owner doubtless strengthened by the certainty that in the densely packed crowd it would be impossible for the Court officers to reach her before she had said her say. "My lord, you cannot condemn this man for the murder of Hubert Dorrien, since Hubert Dorrien is alive and well at this moment. I saw him and talked with him as lately as this very morning. Then I hurried on here, and, thank God, I am in time."

A thrill of indescribable emotion went up from that wrought-up audience, a gasp—that took the form of a deeply-breathed—

"Oh-h!"

"Let her come forward," said the judge, his mind by no means free from suspicion that this was a carefully planned theatrical *coup*.

Way was made for a tall female figure, which, advancing from the back of the room, was ushered forward, and for the sake of convenience was marshalled into the witness box, though not sworn. And the light of the candles, clearer here in the vicinity of the Bench and Bar, revealed an exceedingly attractive face, a face, moreover, well known to many there, but to none better than the prisoner awaiting sentence of death. For it was the face of Lizzie Devine.

"Hubert Dorrien is alive, my lord," she began, without waiting to be interrogated, "alive and well. He is at the

Duke of Cornwall Hotel, at Plymouth, with a broken leg."

At this definition of "alive and well" there was a laugh, a strange, nervous, staccato laugh, with but little merriment in it, however. Rather did it express the collective tension momentarily relaxed.

Then the girl went on to tell her story, how she and Hubert Dorrien had been fellow-passengers on board the homeward bound Australian liner which had arrived in the small hours of that morning. She was with a troupe of variety artistes, who had been touring in the Antipodes, and had not been aware of the missing man's presence on board until they had been some time at sea. Then they had recognised each other, and had become acquainted, in fact, friendly. He had told her how he had fallen over the cliffs near Wandsborough, and been picked up while still unconscious by a coasting schooner, and pretty badly treated, too, he said, for they took everything he had away from him. But the ship was run into by an unknown steamer and sank, only he and another man being saved, and they, after floating about on some wreckage for hours, were picked up by a sailing vessel bound for Perth, Western Australia. She believed that he had done well over there, for he seemed to have plenty of money, and looked twice the man he was as she remembered him at Cranston, prior to his disappearance.

The first that either of them had heard of the trial just concluded, was on landing that morning at Plymouth, where Hubert Dorrien had taken up his quarters at the "Duke of Cornwall." They first saw it in the papers, and as she herself was from Cranston, Hubert had begged her to travel down there with him in order to give evidence as to his identity. He was in a great state of excitement about it all, and in crossing the road, close to his hotel, had been knocked down by a post-office van, and now he was laid up there with a broken leg, but had escaped other injuries. As he was all alone she had remained to look after him, and see that he had proper medical and other attendance. Then he had hurried her off to Battisford to put a stop to the trial, and save all concerned a moment of further and unnecessary anxiety. This she had done, and was here, it appeared, only just in the nick of time.

She had told her story well and concisely, and it had been listened to in breathless silence. The judge, keenly watching her, was convinced of its truth, so too was the Bar. As she herself had said, there could be no possible advantage to anybody in her coming forward with such a statement unless it could be substantiated. Steps had already been taken to break the news to old Mrs. Dorrien, the injured man's mother, who was probably on her way to Plymouth by that time. All Cranston, moreover, would recognise him at a glance. There was no difficulty whatever about that. But his lordship, while believing her statement, swerved not a hairsbreadth from his original and private opinion. He was as certain that the prisoner had, in actual fact, pushed his brother over the cliff, as he now was that the latter had been rescued, in a most astonishing and well-nigh miraculous manner. But meanwhile the jury had returned a verdict of "Guilty."

During this narrative, for the first time throughout the trial, the prisoner had shown sign of outward emotion. His face had gone ghastly white as he listened, and his hand was clutching the dock rail, as he leaned forward, drinking in every word. Great Heaven! What did it all mean? he thought. Were they never going to get it over? Why had Lizzie come forward with this tale, which nobody would for a single moment believe! It could only serve to prolong his agony. And yet—? Then he became conscious of the judge's voice. Sentencing him to death—of course!

"I cannot reopen the case, and call fresh evidence at this stage, Mr. Windgate," his lordship was saying. "You see, the jury have already given their verdict. But I can postpone sentence. Meanwhile you had better have this young lady's statement reduced to writing and duly sworn as an affidavit, and if you can produce the supposed murdered man alive, and incontestably establish his identity, why, there is necessarily an end of the case."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A HEALTH! DORRIEN OF CRANSTON!

"WHAT an awful young brute I must have been in those days, Roland! By Jove! any kicks that may have travelled my way I jolly well deserved." And Hubert Dorrien puffed out a great cloud of smoke upon the sweet evening air.

"I think we all wanted a good shaking up," answered his brother meditatively. "We are a rum lot, you know. At any rate we seem to have got it—all round."

At the further end of the beautiful avenue of feathery elms rose the tall chimney stacks and long windows of Cranston Hall. The air was fragrant with the multifold scents of evening, distilled dewy from flower and herb, and the dappled deer moved like antlered ghosts in the gathering twilight. From the lake, embowered in overhanging leafage, came the craking cry of a waterhen or the plash of a rising fish, and in the boskiness of the home coverts a very chorus of song, as innumerable thrushes and blackbirds poured forth a final evening warble.

"Well, if I got some kicks, at any rate I captured plenty of halfpence," went on Hubert. "Tell you what it is, old chap: that was the best day's work that ever happened when you launched me out into the world to fish for myself."

"It's rum how things do come about," said the other queerly.

"Rather. If I hadn't got on board the *Atlanta*, or if she had transhipped me on to some homeward-bound craft, I shouldn't have got to Australia, and if I hadn't got to Australia I shouldn't have struck that reef, and made my pile. Not but what I didn't have some real rough ups and downs in between."

"To continue the 'ifs,'" said Roland, "what if you hadn't turned up when you did, this time last year? What if your boat had been wrecked, and you had taken another outward-bound trip on some rescuing craft? What then?"

"Don't speak of it, old chap. It's enough to give one

the cold shivers even to think of. But that sweep who had boned my clothes and things had something to answer for, or rather those who were 'thick' enough not to know the difference between him and me, when they held the inquest on him."

"At any rate he sneaked certain elaborate obsequies under false pretences," said Roland drily, whereat the other exploded.

The change which had taken place in Hubert Dorrien had been thorough and complete. Outwardly, there was hardly a trace of the weedy, loose-hung, shifty-mannered youth in the sun-browned, well-set-up man walking here now. Mentally, too, was he no less improved, and the process by which that desirable state of things had come about was, in his own words, that his ups and downs had knocked all the nonsense out of him, and prepared him to appreciate and turn to good account his luck when it came. And this he himself heartily recognised. Roland, on the ther hand, had changed but little, save that the awful ision of those terrible weeks had turned his hair nearly ey. At the conclusion of the affair he had suffered no ss to be made, but had driven quietly back to Cranston, nd resumed life there as if nothing had happened. And hat had been a year ago.

"Fancy Lizzie Devine being fool enough to marry that long-legged cad she was touring with, after all," said Hubert presently.

"Yes. Not good enough for her. By Jove! but that girl is sterling and plucky. That was one of the finest things I ever saw, the way she came forward. Well, if they don't hit it off, I'll back her to come out best."

Incidentally, both brothers had marked the event alluded to with a substantiality that bordered on the munificent. To one, the recollection of her would always be as that of the life-saver to the drowning man.

"And our rascally friend, Gipsy Steve? Does he still keep straight?" went on Hubert.

"Yes. A savage is capable of gratitude, and this one is so grateful to me for prevailing on Neville not to sack him by reason of his giving that evidence, that I believe he'd cut anyone's throat if I told him to. But I only told him to keep straight, and I believe he'll do it.

"Do you know, Roland, you're no end of a popular chap round here now—among the sovereign people, I mean. Why, only the other day, when I was biking, I turned into a pub out beyond Clatton to get a whisky and soda, and the place was full of yokels and a small farmer or two, and they were booming you no end."

"That was for your benefit."

"Not a bit of it. They didn't know me from Adam."

"Then it was on Olive's account. They recognise her as the good genius here."

"That's all right," assented the other heartily. "But I don't think it was altogether on Olive's account, all the same. Besides, I've come across other instances of it. I say, though. Fancy a Dorrien popular! Eh?"

"Yes. Seems odd, doesn't it?"

"I've got some good news to break to you, Roland, so prepare for the shock. I'm going back to Australia, now at once, the day after to-morrow."

"The deuce you are! Tired of us already?"

"Tired of you! My dear old chap, how long have I been over here? Just a year. And about ten months out of the twelve has been spent here. Tired of you! Why, the shoe's on the other hoof, I think."

"That's bosh, Hubert. We've had very jolly times here together. But why are you off? Business?"

"That's it. As part proprietor and director of the Kulgurra and Dawkins Reef Company I've made my pile, and can go on making it. But, the fact is, this sort of life is turning me too soft again. Besides, I have a hankering after a certain amount of Bush life from time to time. They say every fellow gets it once he has known it. I must get back there and hustle around again."

"I daresay you're right after all. Olive will be sorry. But, Hubert, when you are back in the old country again, you know where your home is?"

"Rather, old chap. How things come round, eh? The last place I should ever have thought of in that connection would have been this jolly old place. But now."

"There's an unwelcome sort of song to you, Hubert," said Roland drily, as an unmistakable infantile squall sounded from an upper room, for they had regained the

house now. "One more between you and this. And he's sound in wind and limb; extra so, in fact."

"Oh, skittles, old man," laughed the other. "And as to that, I'll be more of a millionaire than you are, if things go on as they've begun. No, no. You're the man for this place, and I hope you'll live another hundred years—you and Olive—to run it, and my six-month-old godson, now squalling up there, after you."

"What's that? What are you finding fault with your godson about, Hubert?" laughed Olive, who was crossing the hall as they entered, and caught the last words.

"I'm not abusing him. I'm giving him my benediction. Ask Roland."

"Fact, Olive," supported the latter. "But Hubert is leaving us to-morrow. He's off to Australia the day after."

"No. But where's the hurry. Short notice, isn't it?"

And then she tried to prevail upon him to put off his departure.

"Can't do it, dear," he answered, greatly pleased. "As I said just now, I'm getting soft here. And I've been accustomed of late to make all my moves at short notice."

"Where's Roy?" said Roland suddenly. "The rascal seems to have deserted me in these days."

"Roy, indeed? You haven't asked after your son and heir, I notice," said Olive, in feigned indignation.

"H'm! *Seniores priores.* Roy is a much older friend," returned Roland. "Moreover, he is an intelligent animal, whereas the other is not—as yet."

"You hard-hearted, unnatural parent. But—here he is."

"Who? Roy, I hope."

"I scorn to reply."

"Ha-ha! You're spared the trouble. Come here, Roy, you scamp. What do you mean by deserting me in this fashion? Eh, sir?"

The woolly rascal rushed at his master, squirming and whining with delight, as he made playful snaps at the hand wherewith his said master was pulling his ears, and only flailing a couple of knickknacks off a low table with his wagging brush.

"Go now and dress, you people, or you'll be late, as usual," laughed Olive.

It was essentially a family party, that which gathered round the dinner-table at Cranston that evening, and it was the anniversary of the sudden rolling away of that last and terrible cloud, which had lain so heavily on all concerned since last we saw them together. Dr. Ingelow was there, genial, sunny-hearted, as of yore, and Margaret. Sophie, too, tyrannising over and teasing her *fiancé*—none other than Frank Marsland, there at her side. Nellie Dorrien, however, is missing, and, in fact, is far enough away, for she is making her *début* in an Indian station as a bride of a month, Eustace Ingelow being there quartered. But they are all uncommonly lively, except that every now and then the recollection of Hubert's impending departure creates a momentary silence, for he has long been one of this circle, and they will miss him.

From the repartee and laughter of the general conversation, Olive, sitting there, bright and winning as of old, at times drops out. The anniversary of this night rests in her memory still; so, too, does that other terrible night, when they went down into the Valley of the Shadow together—when they stood beneath the iron cliffs in the dim gloaming, and Death stared them in the face, and his grisly hand was over them, reached forth from the on-rushing thunder of raving surges. Both these ordeals had left their mark upon her, moulding her character, and bringing out the best of her nature, shining and durable. No cloud remained now.

But—the Ban! More than a year had passed and gone since its last and grisly manifestation, but none had fallen victim. It was as though cheated. But further literary research on the legendary terror overshadowing his house had carried a reassuring conviction to the mind of Roland Dorrien, strange in the light of his utter and scoffing scepticism on the subject in former times. This was nothing less than a prophecy appended to the prophecy, and done out of the quaintly-spelt and worded phraseology of its period, this is how it ran:

"All events befall in cycles. One woman consigned these two to the bloodless Death. Generations seven shall pass, and he of that time two women shall save from it. Then the Ban shall be removed and the bloodless Death shall depart from Craunston."

The cryptic utterance revealed itself to Roland's mind as clear as daylight. He, himself, was of the seventh generation from the original event, and sure, indeed, was it that two women had saved him—one upon the lone sea coast, and one, indeed, from a still more hideous form of the bloodless Death. And so deciding, he was conscious of a relief that was hardly in keeping with his former scepticism.

Such thoughts, not for the first time, are underlying his mind as he sits at the head of his bright and sparkling dinner-table here this evening. Then Marsland's voice breaks in upon his meditations.

"Before we separate, I want to propose a health, one specially appropriate this evening. Are you all charged? Well then—A health! Dorrien of Cranston!"

Hearty, spontaneous, and sharp is the response.

"A health! Dorrien of Cranston!"

THE END.

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